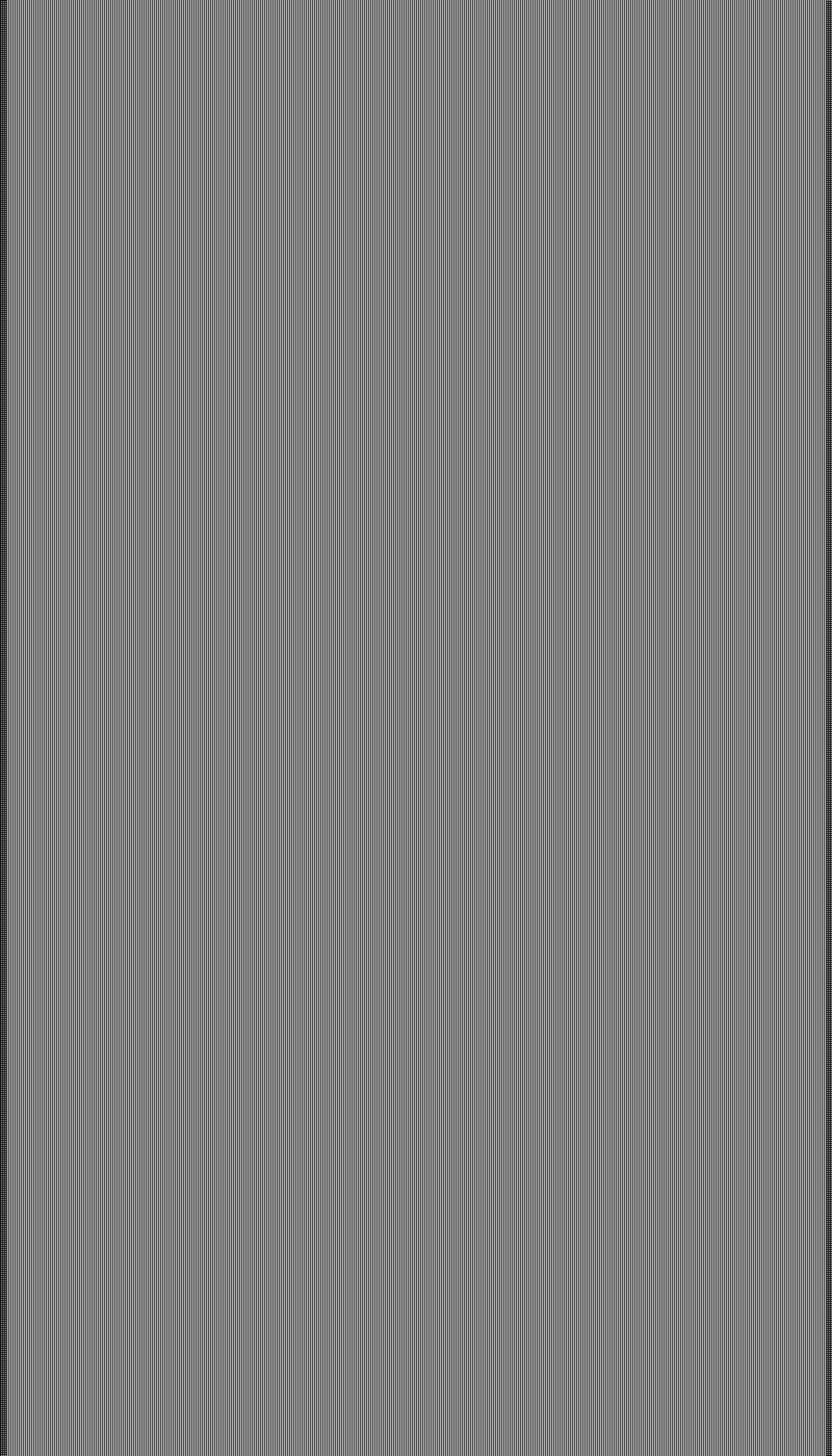


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WHO ARE SUFFERING IT FOR THE SAKE OF
HUSBANDS, FATHERS, BROTHERS
AND
THEIR COUNTRY

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THE EDGE O' BEYOND

CHAPTER I

OSWALD GRANT

OSWALD QUIN GRANT, son of Francis Quin Grant, grandson of the Honourable and Reverend Quin Grant, and great-grandson of the Earl of Neath, stopped in the course of his sowing to rest a moment in the shade.

It was very hot. Hot enough for this great-grandson of a peer to take out his handkerchief and mop his head like any common farmer.

Having done this to his satisfaction, and replaced his double Teri hat, he indulged in a quarter of an hour's contemplation.

All around him, in a like contemplative mood, basked the tall kopjes of Rhodesia. Overhead was the deep, serene, speckless African blue. Close beside him a river babbled. It was the sort of river that always seemed to be laughing up its sleeve, and like an ostrich, trying to hide itself by burying its head in the sand. No glimpse of it was visible as far as its waters were concerned, because it ran along a chasm some twenty feet deep, roofed in by foliage; but threading in and out among the kopjes, and across spaces of dried-up veldt, was a line of rich verdure, punctuated by clumps of leafy trees, which told everyone who knew anything at all about Rhodesia, that a river ran below.

However, down there in its chasm all day long it babbled all manner of foolish chattering to the stones and ferns and foliage, and rippled with laughter to think how cleverly

it had hidden itself. Oswald Grant was rather proud of his river. A good many farms in Rhodesia had no river at all, whereas he had two quite passable streams, and this foliage-laden river as well. It showed considerable perspicacity on his part, he thought, to have managed to obtain one of the comparatively few well watered farms.

At this particular period of his life he was pleased with quite a lot of things, which was a cause for considerable congratulation among those who had dealings with him, as, in adverse circumstances, he was wont to bemoan his fate in a manner that the recipients of his tale of woe found very boring. Looking over his lands now, he indulged in a pleasurable reverie, concerning their fertility, and congratulated himself that, whereas it was somewhat the fashion to decry Rhodesia as an agricultural country, he had succeeded in wrenching some sort of success, and a measure of return, from the wilderness. But, then, of course, he had worked. Never for a moment had he spared the sweat of his brow ; and that, he thought, was no small thing, considering he was the great-grandson of an earl. Why ! who was to know he would not actually come into the title himself some day ? He stood in the direct line. True, his young brother, before whom he had inadvisedly let slip a notion on the subject, had laughed in quite an uncalled-for manner and murmured something, which he considered rather vulgar, about the " houses in between," but no one with any depth would take any notice of such a shallow-brain as he. At the same time, when he allowed himself the pleasure of mentioning the subject, he made a point of leaving out any allusion to the number of uncles and cousins would who need to die untimely deaths to pave his way to the earldom. He had been in Rhodesia six years now, and had his full share of the trials and difficulties that beset the path of the settler in that beautiful country. At first he had cursed his fate early and late, that he ever came. Then they had made him Chairman of the Farmers' Association, and Judge at the Agricultural Show, and he had begun to grow reconciled. Finally, after four and a half years, he went home for three months, partly for a holiday, and partly to look for a wife. Both ends had been achieved, and now, a year later, he almost felt his ship was sailing at last with the wind through summer seas. The future beckoned to him. He saw himself Minister of Agriculture at least, and beyond that, fairest vision of all,

lurked ever the possibility that those uncles and cousins would conveniently die, and open his path to the earldom. Somewhere away in the background of his consciousness, he had a sneaking sense that Providence would rather like him to be the earl. He felt he was undoubtedly well in the running, if it came to a competitive choice. In thirty-six years he could honestly say he had done no wrong—certainly he was not infallible, little sins of omission and commission might have to be scored against him, but no actual, wilful wrong. None of the weaknesses of the average man stood on his black list. He neither drank, nor swore, and he was in no way a slave to his body: an honourable, upright man, hard-working, religious, and with a fair share of common sense. Added to all this was the great boon of birth; he could hold up his head with any in the land.

Encased with so much invincible armour, it was small wonder that he went about his courting with a somewhat patronizing air. At the same time, as English lassies are occasionally known to be very independent young people, it was, perhaps, just as well he had not to run the gauntlet in open combat. The lady to bear his ancient name, and share with him the distant possibility of a peerage, was in reality selected before the Union Castle steamer sighted Southampton. This is most easily explained by a letter he had received from his mother two months previously.

She wrote: "I am delighted to hear that you are coming home for a holiday, and that you are ready to think of marriage. I am a great believer in matrimony, and it has been a disappointment to me that my two sons have remained single so long. There is, however, I feel now, a possibility of tracing the Hand of God in this so momentous question of your life. If I did not feel it over-presumptuous, I should like to say that the Lord has selected a hand-maiden for you. I will explain; you have heard me speak often of my friend, Eleanor Gray, whose husband is the rector of a little parish in Devonshire near Bideford. Last year he died, leaving his wife and an only daughter almost penniless. A small house in the village was subscribed for by some of the richer parishioners, who seem to have been very fond of him, and here I visited Eleanor and her daughter last May. You will probably guess the rest. Joyce Gray is a very sweet girl of nineteen, and from the little I saw of her, she seemed singularly fitted to make

you an agreeable and useful wife. Her poor mother is dying of cancer, and has only a few months to live. When she is gone, Joyce will be penniless and alone. She is healthy and pretty, and she would not be dull in your wilderness home, because she has lived all her life in a tiny fishing village in North Devon. She has none of the objectionable manners of the modern young lady, whom I regard as chiefly remarkable for entire lack of breeding. Neither is she in the habit of neglecting all her home duties to play golf and tennis, though, I believe, she is very fairly proficient at both. I know that my dear Eleanor's daughter must have been well brought up, and carefully guided and instructed in all holiness. Lastly, she has the crowning merit of being your equal in birth. I know how much you think of this qualification, and since God made kings and paupers, it is impossible not to feel it is a possession one may justly be proud of; and had I not been quite sure on the point, I should have dismissed the question from my mind. Joyce is well born both on her father's and mother's side, and her first cousin is heir to the title and estates of Lord Neversham. In short, my dear Oswald, if you arrive home fancy free, I urge you to lose no time in travelling to Devonshire, on some pretext of seeing the country, and securing this sweet girl for your wife. Her mother was in such distress about her future, that I felt there was no harm in hinting at the possibility of such a happy solution, and I know she is anxiously looking for your advent. Need I add, dearest Oswald, I told her what an excellent son you had always been to your poor dear father and to me; and what pride we have ever had in your honourable, upright character, your nobleness of mind, and your unswerving obedience to duty?"

Oswald Grant always had a "Lodge's Peerage" in his possession, and when he had finished his mother's letter, he folded it carefully, replaced it in the envelope, and went in search of his Peerage. Then he sat on the stoep and studied carefully the antecedents and position of Lord Neversham, and his probable relation to the Reverend Theodore Gray.

All round him the everlasting hills reared their stately heads into the blue serenity above—hiding—was it possible?—a faint smile. Below, in the valley hidden by the enfolding foliage, the river was laughing in its sleeve. When Oswald put down the Peerage there was a new

expression of satisfaction on his face, and from that moment he went apace with his plans for his home trip.

As soon as possible after his arrival in England he journeyed west, to see something of North Devon; and found his way, quite naturally, to the little fishing village near Bideford. Joyce was away somewhere in a boat when he called. It sounded, from her mother's description, as if she had gone out in one of the fishing smacks with a village fisherman; but that could hardly be, he reasoned, and put the thought aside. No doubt someone near had a yacht, and had taken her out for a treat. In the meantime he had a long talk with the poor invalid, who had evidently not very long to live; and, being kind-natured according to his lights, he easily succeeded in winning her confidence and respect, and impressing her with the belief that he was a good man who would know how to take care of her precious child. Once or twice she detected a certain tone of superiority that jarred a little on her own exquisite refinement, and a passing suggestion—say it not in Gath—of snobbishness; but she tried to blind herself instantly and give her attention entirely to the unselfish, affectionate way in which he spoke of his mother, her old school friend. When he left, an hour afterwards, Joyce's fate was practically sealed.

"Oswald Grant has been here," her mother said quietly, when she came in with a flushed, eager, tanned face, and bright eyes, as blue as Devon's own sea. "Did you see him anywhere in the village?"

Joyce turned sharply to the window, that looked away across the sea towards Lundy. "What is he like?" she asked.

"Very tall and thin, with a stoop, and his face is a good deal sunburnt, from the voyage. He is coming to supper to-night. Run away now, dearie, and do your hair. The wind seems to have blown it everywhere except where it ought to be."

"We had such a glorious time, mummy!" The girl hung over her mother's chair a moment, and a gleam came back to her eyes, that had momentarily clouded. "John Turner and Will Baxter caught a lot of fish, and I brought four home that I caught myself. I should have caught more, only they made me stay in the only clean spot on the boat, and as they had cleaned it purposely, I didn't like to refuse. But it wasn't a good place for catch."

ing. All the same, it was lovely and fishy. I do love the smell of tarred ropes and woollen jerseys and general fishiness."

Her mother smiled a little wistfully. If they could have just stayed on there—she and her beloved child together, how passing good it would have been! But she rallied herself bravely.

"Put on your clean white muslin frock, sweetheart," she said; "we don't have a young man to supper every day in the week."

Under his shady tree, in his contemplative mood, Oswald Grant vaguely included his wife in the various things that he felt did so much credit to his good sense. So many men choose a wife for her mere prettiness, and never give a thought to her suitability. Naturally, shipwreck often follows. In selecting Joyce Gray, he had borne in mind particularly that she had been well and simply brought up, and that, having always lived in an out-of-the-world spot, far removed from any town gaiety, she was specially adapted to share his life on a lonely colonial farm.

He had not, perhaps, had time to get to know her very well before they were married, but she pleased and satisfied his critical sense; and the result, he felt, had entirely fulfilled his expectation.

He believed she had been more lonely than he had at all expected of her considering his own attentions, but she had never actually complained, and, anyhow, she would have more than enough to occupy her lonely hours very soon. It was strange to think that, when this wheat he was sowing was ready for reaping, there would be a little new morsel of humanity up at the house. He smiled to himself half self-consciously. It was so truly in keeping with the general fitness of things that his marriage should be blessed with a child. He hoped it would be a boy, to carry on his name, and to create another link in connection with that far-off earldom.

He stood up and stretched himself. It was past their usual tea hour, but he particularly wanted to finish this piece of sowing, and, no doubt, Joyce would be sensible enough to have her own tea and not wait. So he started off again, casting his seed in carefully modulated curves: a tall, spare figure of a man, with a very marked stoop, and a general looseness about his whole aspect, that was not entirely ingratiating.

CHAPTER II

JOYCE

WHILE her husband finished his self-allotted portion of sowing, Joyce was sobbing her heart out face downwards on the bed. In the stable, on the kopje side, her dearly loved pony lay dead.

"It can't be true, I can't believe it," she moaned once or twice, but no blessed denial of the dreadful truth fell on her storm-tossed soul, and she sobbed pitifully on. A nigger boy had come to tell her, and she had hurried with sickening dread to the stable. On his straw, very peacefully, "Mischief" indeed lay dead.

"Mischief!" she had breathed once or twice in agonizing accents; but the dear eyes were glassy and unseeing, and for the first time in his life Mischief paid no heed to his beloved mistress's voice. Then blinded with tears she had stumbled back to the house, to sob her heart out alone.

She had never believed that he would die. This dreadful African horse-sickness that carried off half the horses in Rhodesia, would surely never touch her Mischief. Had he not come all the way from England—all the way from blessed Devon—to be her chief friend and companion in this lonely land? A wedding present to her from the Squire of her father's parish, who had generously paid the entire expense also of transmitting him to far Rhodesia.

"It's a far country, and I'm not over fond of foreign lands myself," the kindly Squire had said to the sad-eyed bride; "you'll have a few memories in common out there, and Mischief will be a Devonshire keepsake, that will help you through a good many lonesome hours."

And now he was dead. She kept saying it over and over to herself, totally unable to grasp it: "Dead—dead—dead."

No more wild scampers in the freshness of the morning; no more tiresome, difficult drifts to get across; no more steep, stony paths to manipulate; no more fun showing

his heels to the nigger boys, and driving them helter-skelter from the stable ; no more mischievous pranks slipping off unnoticed to steal the young oats and barley ; no more showing off to these African horses what a Devonshire pony could do with a Devonshire lass on his back ; no more troublesome, fidgeting blind flies and mosquitoes—all was over—on his clean bed of straw in the hillside stable Mischief lay dead.

He had only been ill a day and a half—the end seemed to have come like a flash of lightning. The morning before he had refused his breakfast, and her husband had told her he seemed “ off colour.” Later, he had eaten, and seemed to enjoy some fresh green lucerne, gathered for him by her own hand, and Joyce had let herself hope all things. At night Oswald had murmured something about the mysterious horse-sickness, and for one moment her heart had seemed to stand still. But, in any case, some horses got over it, and with such a mild attack Mischief would certainly be among them. Meanwhile Oswald injected some wonderful cure, and was very kind, and she knew that he was very clever in his knowledge of horses. But this morning Mischief had seemed to be worse, and she had prayed him to send for a veterinary surgeon.

“ But, my dear child,” he had answered a trifle testily, “ it is not the slightest use. The horse is no worse ; and in any case, a vet. couldn't do anything. It is quite out of the question to send twelve miles on such a wild-goose chase. Just leave him alone and he will be all right in a day or two. The medicine I have given him is the best possible cure.”

He had come up to lunch early, and looked in at the pony on his way.

“ I have just seen Mischief,” he said, “ and I think he'll pull through all right.”

Joyce made no reply. Three times through that long morning she had gone to him, with dainties he might fancy, petting, coaxing, encouraging. “ You'll soon be better, Mischief,” she kept saying to him with forced cheerfulness ; “ keep your heart up, my sweetheart ; you'll soon be well again.”

The last time he hardly seemed to know her. She had held one of his favourite sweet carrots to his mouth, and he had bitten it weakly in half. Both halves fell to the ground, and he made no attempt to reach them. Joyce

hid her face against his neck then, and scalding tears blinded her eyes.

"Get well, Mischief," she prayed. "Get well. You are all I have of the . . . dear . . . old . . . days. Oh, get well, if it is only for my sake!"

An hour later the horse-boy had come to tell her that he was dead. She had received the news in silence, saying nothing to him about telling "the boss," and gone up to the stable to make quite sure it was indeed the truth.

Afterwards through the hot, oppressive afternoon, only her heartbroken sobs broke the silence.

Once or twice she sat up, with dishevelled hair and tear-stained face, and muttered with clenched hands, "I won't forgive him; I won't."

For a moment her sweet eyes shone with a steely light of anger. Then the pitiful sense of her loneliness would overflow anew—her utter and helpless dependence upon this man, who had apparently hurt her in some grievous way. All around the tall kopjes hemmed her in—a whole world seemed to lie between her and all she loved; she felt she might almost have been in another planet, so far away was the comfort her soul craved. His brick walls enclosed her, the very clothes she wore were his; without him she had nothing at all in all the wide world—how could she dare to do other than forgive?

"Mischief was mine absolutely," she breathed fiercely. "He had no right to touch him at all; no gentleman would have behaved in such a way."

Her mind flew back yet again to the harrowing incident, that stabbed her passionate sorrow with passionate reproach. A few days previously, when she was waiting to mount and ride away, Oswald had been cutting her pony's mane before the house. And suddenly a fly had settled on Mischief's nose, and caused him to jerk his head, and the shears had pricked the holder's hand. In a sudden, violent spasm of irritation he had exclaimed angrily, and, with heavy hob-nailed shooting boots on, kicked the horse in the stomach. Poor Mischief, two-thirds a thoroughbred, and sensitive to a degree, had reared backwards in terror. When Oswald had succeeded in quieting him again he had turned to find his silent little wife confronting him with blazing eyes.

"How dare you!" she breathed passionately. "How

dare you! You shan't behave like that to Mischief. I *won't* stand it."

For a moment he had been taken aback; the outbreak was so unexpected, and then he had laughed a little cruelly.

"Then Mischief should behave himself," he said. "I'm not going to have pieces of flesh dug out of my hands for Mischief or anyone else."

His manner quieted her sudden violence, but in no way lessened her anger.

"You are a coward," she said with cutting calmness. "Only a coward and a bully would kick a horse like Mischief so!"

He bit his heavy lower lip suddenly, but when he turned to reply, she had gone, and a sullen, angry expression settled on his face. A quarter of an hour later Joyce dismounted in the trees, and had a good cry on Mischief's neck. She knew she was helpless to resent it, helpless to do anything but endure silently. Had he not hit a puppy and broken its leg, the first month she was out, for some puppy offence—and only relapsed into a sullen anger of long duration when she upbraided him for it. She knew exactly what to expect on her return. He would not say anything; that was not his way. He would vent his displeasure on her in one of those dreadful sulking fits that made her secretly desperate. He would not speak at all, unless she addressed him direct, and that loose lower lip would protrude more than usual. He would make her feel that she was in the wrong, although she passionately knew it was unjust, and his manner would subtly imply that he was generously and nobly patient with her. And all day long the tall kopjes would shut her in, stifling with their stony calm, her eager, young intensity.

That was only five days ago. And now Mischief lay dead. No frowning kopjes—no prison walls—could stifle yet the delirious anger that mingled ever and anon with her hopeless pain.

And then over all swept suddenly a wave of homesickness, such as, may it please the good God above, is only for the few. Instead of those forbidding kopjes, she saw the blue seas of her beloved Devon. In place of the wind among the mealies she heard the rush of joyous waves upon a sun-kissed beach. In a little unpretentious

cottage a sweet-faced woman watched for her return, and hung upon her words when she came. In the fishing-smacks, bronzed, bearded, giant-limbed fishermen kept an eye in the direction she might come to welcome her.

And Mischief had known about it all. In their lonely scampers they had talked of it sometimes—the Devonshire lass and her Devonshire pony—exiles together in a land that could never seem other to them than alien.

In a paroxysm of weeping she prayed God to let her die also. "I know he's a good man," she moaned, "but I can't love him, and to-day I can't forgive him. Now Mischief is dead, I can't stay alone. O God! let me die too; let me die too . . . !"

When Oswald came up from his sowing, he heard the news from the house-boys, and strode at once to her room.

"Why in the world didn't you send the boy to tell me about Mischief?" he asked. She was lying with her face buried in the pillow, and she did not look up. He came forward and sat on the bed. A scarcely susceptible shrinking was all the sign she gave that she knew of his presence. He put out his hand as if to caress her, and then for some unknown reason drew it back. She was given to strange moods sometimes, this silent, blue-eyed girl; for once, even through his dense self-satisfaction, crept a lurking sense that he had better not intrude.

"Anyhow, it's no use fretting yourself ill," he said, getting up and moving to the door, where he stood a moment looking across the lands. "Of course, I'll try and get you another pony soon, and in the meantime the mule, Hester, is quite quiet enough to ride."

No response from the bed, only perhaps a still greater shrinking of the crouching form. His clumsy attempt at consolation was only hurting her more. And then there was still that hideous incident of the kick. She wished he would go away. It was dreadful to be alone, but it was better than this goading reproach which she might not voice. If he stayed long, she felt she would lose her hold of herself and call him coward again—coward and bully. And then there would follow the sullen disapproval that crushed her.

"Of course, it was very likely to happen," he went on presently. "Horses are always dying out here. I have

warned you once or twice that it was foolish to make such an idol of him."

He turned and came back to the bedside. "Come, cheer up. You shall have another pony soon," he said sententiously, and stooped to kiss her forehead. But at that Joyce's fortitude suddenly gave way. She felt she would be disloyal to her dead pet to receive the kiss then, and blindly—unthinkingly—she put out both her hands and held him off. He looked surprised. "Why, what do you mean?" he asked.

"Only five days ago you kicked him—I can't forget, please go away."

"You ridiculous child!" he exclaimed vexedly, and strode out of the room.

When he had gone she sat up. "No, not to-night," she was saying; "I can't bear any more to-night. I think I'd rather he killed me."

She dragged herself to her feet feeling weak and dizzy, but bravely set about making some sort of a toilet.

"I must appear at dinner," was her thought; "but afterwards, perhaps——"

At dinner he maintained a stony silence. He was vexed with her and vexed with himself, and more perturbed than he would have owned at the death of the pony.

"You are not eating anything," he said once. "Surely, you are not so foolish as to risk letting your health suffer just now? I must insist upon your, at least, being reasonable."

"I'm sorry," she faltered, "but I don't feel quite equal to tinned meat to-night. I'll drink a glass of milk."

He frowned. "You should have had a fowl killed," was all he said.

His lack of sympathy brought home more forcibly than ever her loneliness, and tears gushed to her eyes, which she tried in vain to stifle. At the end of the second course she stood up with a flurried movement:

"I think I'll go to bed," she said; and added nervously, "If you don't mind, I'll sleep in the spare room to-night. I don't think I shall get much sleep—and—and—I should probably disturb you."

She saw him flush suddenly, while an expression of veiled resentment spread over his face. In some subtle way, she knew he had taken it as a personal affront. She

felt like a culprit, condemned at the harsh tribunal of a man who inherited almost intact the comfortable theories of his forefathers concerning the obligations of a wife. In his eyes she had practically no right to any individual will, outside her housekeeping concerns. Nevertheless, she held her ground, although his disapproving silence was intended on his part to give her time to correct her error.

At last, without looking at her, he got up and pushed back his chair.

"As you like," he said coldly, and strode out of the room.

Poverty had decreed that Joyce Gray should not have many of the world's luxuries in the short term of life she had so far lived; but what Fate had withheld with one hand she had hitherto generously made up with the other. At least, there had always been love and sympathy in abundance, and the glad companionship of loyal hearts. From the first moment in her new life she had missed the very best things in the old, and found nothing to replace them. The love offered her patronizingly, and which she had been constrained by circumstances, and a dying mother's wish, to accept, proved to be of the cut-and-dried quality that knows less of real sympathy than many a schoolboy's, and is most comfortably and entirely convinced of the fact that its recipient is a person whom Fortune has been pleased to favour.

Being a brave lassie, and not forgetting she had, at any rate in a measure, chosen for herself, she had pluckily succeeded in hiding a good deal of chagrin and still more pain. Nevertheless, there were times when the need of sympathy and real tenderness gripped her so forcibly that she could feel nothing else, and all her fortitude forsook her.

With his cold "As you like," and impatient stride out into the night, that awful sense of lonesome came back with redoubled force. She remembered piteously all the past weeks and months of silent endurance in the dead solitude of those overshadowing kopjes. Always she had told herself it would be better by and by, when she had become accustomed to it and was better able to bear her mother's death. And always the sense of deadness had increased. The feeling sometimes that she was not alive at all, only pretending to be. And now it would

have to be borne without even Mischief. That Oswald Grant was totally incapable of entering to the smallest degree into these painful longings was not in the least surprising. He was not a man who would ever enter into anyone's feelings but his own. He had his work, and his work interested him. He had a fair sprinkling of men friends around. He had a weekly jaunt to town, when he attended meetings, where his word was looked upon as law in farming matters, which was a form of flattery his soul loved. He had, lastly, his change between morning and evening, when he could thoroughly enjoy a well-earned rest. It was only for the woman that the hours held deadness, and dragged themselves by with lagging footsteps.

And to-night, with this new anguish in her heart, she seemed to have reached some limit, beyond which her aching brain refused to pass. She stood a moment irresolutely, looking at the open doorway through which he had passed; then she went silently to the little stretcher-bed that was all that graced the small spare room. She was too exhausted to cry any more, yet her brain continued vividly alive, and would not rest.

For an hour she remained in dumb anguish, trying vainly to sleep, and then a dreadful, death-like sensation seemed to grip her body and soul. She tried to call out, but her voice sounded only a feeble, incoherent murmuring. Finally, with a superhuman effort she struggled to her feet, and dragged herself into the sitting-room where her husband sat reading.

"Do you want anything?" he asked, scarcely looking up.

"I . . . I . . . think I'm going to be ill," she said, and slid helplessly to the floor.

CHAPTER III

DINAH

DAYRELL WEBBERLEY, commonly called Dinah, and Cecil Lawson, were never introduced to each other, which was, of course, disgraceful; though it must be confessed their subsequent enduring friendship never appeared to

suffer in any degree from the flagrant flouting of Mrs. Grundy at the commencement.

They met in the mail train between Buluwayo and Salisbury, when Fortune gave them a compartment to themselves, through the unexpected retirement of a third passenger, who was discovered by a friend from the other end of the train, and persuaded to join him.

Dr. Lawson had come all the way from the Cape in company with certain other passengers of the *Kildonan Castle*, bound for Rhodesia, but with none of whom he was particularly friendly. They had helped to pass the time a little, and that was all, though they naturally formed a small clique on the train. After the seventeen days at sea they all knew each other pretty well, and were conveniently versed in the particular line upon which each, individually, was apt to become boring. Some of them had also had time to quarrel and make it up again, a pastime which enlivens many a sea voyage for the mere looker-on, and makes a sometime welcome break in the relentless discipline of boredom with which the sea leavens her delightful mode of travel. The advent of fresh passengers at Buluwayo, was not, however, looked upon with an entirely favourable eye. It is remarkable with what a superior, slightly resentful air such an advent is usually regarded by travellers who have seen the trip through from the beginning; and how more or less unconsciously they are inclined to indulge in an uncalled-for self-satisfaction over the feat. However, it was all lost on Dinah Webberley, and it would not have troubled her in the least had it not been. For Dinah found a great many things in the world too interesting to allow time for anything but good-humoured raillery over the whims and oddities of her fellow-creatures. At first her interest was centred chiefly in the scenery, but finding a great sameness about the view from a Rhodesian railway carriage, she quickly turned her attention to her two companions. The one, a remarkably fine, soldierly looking man of about forty, was almost immediately claimed by a hearty voice, exclaiming, "Hullo, Major! Didn't know you were coming out again so soon."

"Hullo!" replied the Major. "What has brought you into the Salisbury train? I thought you had been transferred to Jo'burg."

"Come into my compartment and have a drink," said the first speaker. "I'm all alone."

Whereupon they departed, and Dinah turned her attention to the interesting face of her other companion. She had already gathered from their labels that both men had come out on the *Kildonan Castle*, but otherwise they appeared to have little in common. The gallant-looking Major was evidently a man of the world, but the quiet-faced man in the corner had more the air of a student and thinker. He was reading "The Bee," by Maeterlinck, and seemed more engrossed in it than Dinah thought at all necessary, though she knew perfectly well how fascinating a book it was. Finally, she got restless, and being a young person of infinite resource, and accustomed to being a law unto herself in a great many matters, she decided to take the initiative. This she did by ostentatiously throwing down her paper and heaving a sigh of boredom that caused the reader to look up in no small surprise.

She met his glance with a frankness that was entirely disarming, and remarked, a little plaintively:

"Don't you sometimes think the *Over Seas Daily Mail* is like getting the menu without the dinner?"

The reader smiled, no less frankly, and Dinah was instantly struck with the extraordinary charm of this serious-visaged man's smile. It changed his whole face from a certain expression of grave, mental introspection to a quick and ready attitude of generous sympathy.

"I have never read it," he said; "but I am bound to admit the daily edition seems to have a knack of presenting many extraordinary pieces of information which are not generally looked for in the ordinary newspaper menu."

"I love it!" she exclaimed. "It is one of the most humorous institutions of the age. When I am at home I take it every morning with my breakfast. It helps me to start the day with a laugh, and that's about one of the best tonics I know. Of course, I'm perfectly aware you brainy people think it's a flagrant transgression, or a sign of weak intellect, but that's because you don't regard it in the right light. I always read it in the mood I imagine the editor edits it. Can't you fancy him giving a little laugh, and saying about some paragraph, 'Couldn't we pile it on just a little thicker?' Only to take the

Daily Mail seriously is to lose its good points altogether."

"I'm afraid I'm not in a position to express much of an opinion," he replied, "as I never see it. To tell you the truth, I haven't found life long enough to read the *Daily Mail*."

"I suppose you read that stodgy concoction the *Times* instead! I haven't found life long enough for that. It's much better to feel amused than fuddled."

She broke off suddenly. "You've come out by the *Kildonan Castle*, haven't you?" glancing at his baggage labels. "Who's the Field-Marshal?"

"The Field-Marshal?" a little mystified.

"The warrior bold who started the journey with us. I like to see a man like that. He looks a soldier from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot—don't you think so? As if he were used to shouting commands in about two words to whole regiments, and would almost have an apoplectic fit if he were not instantly obeyed."

The doctor laughed.

"That was Major Egerton," he said. "I don't exactly know what he is doing now, but he distinguished himself pretty considerably in the late war. He had a state cabin on the ship, and he was much admired by the ladies," he finished with a twinkle.

Dinah twinkled back.

"Were they fair scorchers?" she asked. "Morals were quite at a premium on my boat. I've always heard it's a cargo not much carried by the Union Castle Line."

"Ship life is always demoralizing," the doctor replied simply.

Dinah twinkled more than ever, but not openly. It rather caught her fancy to think of this grave, brainy-looking young man, calmly stating the demoralizing tendency of a voyage. She wondered if he had found it a little difficult to steer clear of the world, the flesh and the devil, as represented by the passenger list.

"Have you come out to stay?" she asked, with an air of *camaraderie* that was distinctly engaging, without being familiar.

"No. Nervous breakdown," and he looked a little amused at her frank question. "I'm going to stay with a friend farming near Salisbury."

"I'm going to a farm too. How odd if we are neigh-

bours! I've got a twin brother out here—William De Eresby Webberley—commonly known as Billy Pink'un. I've come out to keep house for him; but he's much to be pitied, because if there's one thing in this world I know less about than anything else, it's the occupation usually known as keeping house. I'm not a bit domesticated—never was. Don't know how to be. I once went to a shop and ordered a ton of sugar. The shopkeeper asked me if I'd mind having a hundredweight or two to go on with!"

"Perhaps it will be easier out here," he suggested, leaning forward with his arms across his knees and looking a good deal entertained.

"If it isn't, Heaven help us all! and save us from battle, murder and sudden death."

"What! Have you several twin brothers?"

"No, but Billy's got two partners. He says one is noted for his beauty, and the other for the scarcity of his clothing. He says they can never any of them go to Salisbury more than one at a time, because they can only muster one decent rig-out between them, and they have to toss for that. Sounds as if it might be an interesting household, doesn't it?"

"It won't lack novelty, I should think."

"No; I take it that's going to be its charm. And the beauty of it is, when I was last any length of time in one place, it was in one of the largest mansions in Kensington Palace Gardens. I *love* extremes. I'm only sorry Billy isn't still living in a mud hut, with packing cases for chairs. That's how he began."

"Have you been travelling for some time then?"

"Yes, I've been knocking round for about a year, between the Pyrenees and Sicily and the Austrian Tyrol. Living in my boxes, so to speak, and expending no end of brain power trying to master new coinages. It's unsettling, of course, but I don't mind that. I think nothing is more dreadful than to be settled in one place for a period unknown. I'd sooner live in a flying machine."

"If it weren't for the risk of falling out with one's pal . . ." suggested the doctor, whereat Dinah bubbled approvingly.

"I wonder which I shall like best," she ran on—"the beautiful partner, or the scantily clothed one? My leaning is toward the latter. The beauty is certain to

be conceited, whereas it is fairly obvious the other doesn't care a . . . well, a hm-humph," mischievously. "I might call them Beauty and the Beast, mightn't I?" and her low, rippling laughter was very pleasing to the grave-eyed doctor. "Billy is a beauty too. I always say we got mixed up at the christening, and when the fairies came along they gave him the 'fairness of face' that was intended for me, and gave me his 'quickness of brain and big feet.'" She pushed out a daintily clad foot. "They are big, aren't they?"—ruefully—"but they're very shapely, which is better than being small and ugly, isn't it?"

"Decidedly," with smiling reassurance.

"And I suppose my face might have been worse, though Billy says it couldn't. When he wants to be particularly objectionable he says it's like a kite; and once when I rashly exclaimed my face was my fortune, he remarked, 'Then you'll soon be needing outdoor relief.' Rather good for Billy, that! He's a bird, really. If you're anywhere near, you must come and see us."

"My friend's name is Burnett, Captain Burnett. He used to be in the 9th Hussars, and then a freak made him resign and go and play at farming in Rhodesia. Such a good chap he is—but he ought not to have left the Army. He had a career before him there."

"Why, of course, I know him!" she cried, "or rather of him. Billy has often mentioned Burnett. I'm sure he's not far away. We shall be sure to meet. I expect you'll come over and find me in a big pinafore, trying to look domesticated, and privately swearing like a trooper because the bread won't rise. How long are you going to stay?"

"About three months. I expect you'll come over with your brother and find me giving medical advice at prohibitive fees to pallid niggers."

"Pallid niggers!" she echoed. "How delicious! Are you a doctor?"

"Cecil Lawson, F.R.C.S. and M.D. of London, at your service," and he made her a little bow.

"I'm Dinah Webberley. I really rejoice in the name Dayrell De Eresby Webberley, but I couldn't possibly live up to it; it's too imposing altogether, so my pals call me Dinah; or Di. People who are not pals don't count—which is just as well, because they all disapprove

of me. Of course, I'm sorry—but, after all, I'm as the Lord made me—except where the devil had a finger in the pie—and it's quite hopeless for anyone to try and change me. Billy's the same. We haven't time for acquaintances at all, and if we do try to be agreeable, we only get ourselves disliked. We often try hard. We talk to Scotch people about scones, and Irish about kings and ancestors, and clergymen about churches, and newly married couples about babies, and old married ones about servants, and yet we don't get on. No one seems to take us seriously, and it's really most unfair. It's been the same ever since we toddled up to one of the pater's parishioners, as kiddies, and asked her if she wasn't glad her baby was dead, because it was so ugly. We only meant to be kind, but we're always misunderstood."

"You manage to look very well on it," noting a certain freshness about her colourless face, and the clearness of the candid eyes that twinkled so irresistibly.

"Well? Rather! I haven't an ache or a care in the world—'No past nor nuthin',' as the disappointed Irish priest said to the penitent," and while they were still laughing the Major came back to fetch his cigar-case. He looked a little surprised, and glanced at his fellow passenger with an amused expression. Later, he remarked to his friend, "Rather curious—the man who is in that other carriage came over on the *Kildonan*, and all the way across he never got really friendly with any of the lady passengers, though they were a good deal taken with him. When I went back for my cigar-case just now, I found him apparently on excellent terms already with the passenger in the corner, who got in at Buluwayo."

"What is he going to Salisbury for? Did you say he was a doctor? No room for any more of the medical profession there, surely?"

"He's travelling for his health. Going to stay with Burnett, out at Ambleside. You know him—Ted Burnett—used to be in the Hussars! This man's name is Lawson, and they tell me, for a young man, he's extraordinarily clever and successful. I believe he is a specialist of some sort."

"I wonder who the girl is? I noticed her on the platform, and I thought she looked very smart. It's rather a change to see a smart woman out here nowadays."

"I'm rather interested in seeing Salisbury," Dinah was saying. "I've been staying in Buluwayo, you know, and the general opinion of Salisbury there seems to be that it is eaten up with officialdom and pomposity, and an extraordinary amount of strut on twenty-five pounds a month. Sounds as if it might be amusing, doesn't it?" "I hope to be very little there," the doctor told her. "Burnett tells me he scarcely ever goes in. He implied that it bored him to distraction, so I daresay you are not far wrong."

"Buluwayo is a man's place," she ran on. "All the men like it; but the women seem to find it rather dull. I fancy this farm of Billy's is going to prove more entertaining than either of them. I'm certain he doesn't know anything about farming. When he came out here he'd done nothing in his life except put in two years at the war, and as far as he knows, he never fired at a Boer all the time. But, of course, they gave him the medal." with a humorous expression.

The train sped on through the flat, uninteresting country, strewn here and there with solitary kopjes, looking like fossilized mammoths; but to the doctor and Dinah the hours were no longer burdened with tedium. Dinah chattered on, just as she ever had done with people she liked, strangers or otherwise, since she was a child, and the doctor listened with an enjoyment he had no wish to conceal. By the time he had helped her from the train and seen her safely into her brother's keeping at Salisbury, he felt as if he had known her for years, and only too gladly accepted the renowned Billy Pinkun's pressing invitation, to go over to The Knoll at the earliest opportunity.

Then he turned away to look for Ted Burnett, who drove up a little late, and hastened to greet him eagerly with mingled welcomes and apologies.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOLT OF DESTINY

"JOVE! but this is peaceful!" And the doctor heaved a sigh of utter content, as he stretched his long legs on the wicker lounge-chair Burnett had had placed on the verandah for him. All around, satiated through and

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through with that sense of peacefulness, from horizon to horizon, stretched the Rhodesian veldt. Not the flat, treeless veldt generally associated with South Africa, but a veldt of kopjes and vleis—of little busy, winding rivers, and much woodland. Before them the country rose gently in a long sweep to the horizon, bounded on one side with tree-decked hills, and on the other by a tall unwooded kopje, trimmed with vine gardens. On the left a long valley lay like a nest lined with trees. Behind, stretching away into those mysterious spaces of Central Rhodesia, known chiefly to big game hunters, was a range of granite kopjes, studded with huge boulders that gleamed white in the sunlight by day and took on a weird, eerie appearance by night. Overhead, in Africa's wonderful heavens, the starry world gleamed steadily, seeming, to this weary denizen of cities, the very essence of stupendous magnitude, stupendous power, stupendous peace.

"I knew you'd like it," Burnett answered, in the simple direct way of a man of few words; and went on pulling silently at his beloved pipe.

Ted Burnett might be taken as a fairly representative type of Rhodesian colonist. Clever, handsome, debonair, well read, he demonstrated, unintentionally, a healthy form of the simple life, absolutely free of asceticism, or any mawkish effeminacy. When the growing restraint, and fettered schoolboy treatment of the Army, fretted his independent soul overmuch, he resigned his commission, and informed the astounded ears of his parents that he was going to farm in Rhodesia. They expostulated a good deal to no effect—then they gave him three months in which to weary of his new whim. When his old Harrow pal, Cecil Lawson, came out to stay with him, he had been twelve months at Ambleside, and his distressed parents had ceased to marvel over the growing, unmistakable content of his letters. His mother, a well-known lady in a distinguished law and literary circle, commenced to amuse herself in leisure hours, copying out simple recipes for curing bacon, and making cream cheese, and various other concoctions her misguided, dearly-loved son might find comforting to his inner man, since he persisted in entirely disregarding her advice concerning his outer one; and posted to him at intervals, along with oceans of quinine and phenacetin, various books and pamphlets on poultry and gardening, and on household details.

One or two packages with the Wynberg post-mark, where his old regiment was stationed, brought such literature as "Aids to the Simple Life," by the Rev. Smirker; "The Care of the Baby," "black or white" inserted beside it in brackets, "By Mother"; "Household Words for Reformed Bachelors," "By Aunt Maria," and a long and carefully compiled list of suggestions headed "Hints for a Moral Young Man in the Wilderness": all of which Ted received with his slow, humorous smile, and failing a fire or a waste-paper basket, carefully spread over some shelves he had succeeded in fitting up in his larder, greatly to his own satisfaction, although they listed, somewhat inconveniently to port. Then he went on with his farming, which, it must be admitted, consisted largely of much prowling round with his gun; with occasional intervals of sowing seed, which invariably came up in most annoying patches—superintending the curing of bacon and ham—and strolling round to yarn with other healthy young demonstrators of the "Simple Life." Beside which, it should be stated, that it is not as a farmer Ted Burnett is held up as a model, but as a good all-round, healthy, vigorous colonist, who had his thoughtful hours, and, in spite of isolation and the absence of on-lookers who mattered—never "let himself go" in any single particular appertaining to the gentleman and sportsman.

In appearance he formed a considerable contrast to his friend, the successful doctor. Robust and sturdy to a degree, his face was tanned a delightful brown, which accentuated the intense blueness of his eyes, and blended charmingly with his crisp black hair, that would curl the moment it got a chance, in spite of vigorous brushing and damping. The doctor, on the other hand, was painfully thin, and his sympathetic face bore the unmistakable traces of that suffering invariably meted out to the brilliant brain of genius. One felt instinctively that the physical suffering of his patients hurt him like a personal pain, that the unconquerable limitations of human skill consumed him with impotent longing and impotent regret—that behind a certain cynicism and avowed unbelief, ached a heart that loved humanity to its core, and was by nature too great to pronounce judgment upon the meanest of mankind.

At two extremes almost they seemed to stand; yet, as they had loved each other as boys, so they loved each

other as men, though probably it would have been the very last idea of either, to express so much in words.

It was some little time now before either spoke. The colonial contemplative habit had gained on Ted Burnett to such an extent, that, provided he had the companionship of his pipe or his gun or his dogs, it was of the merest moment whether he talked or not. The doctor was feeling the effects of a Rhodesian veldt road on his sparsely covered bones, and enjoying the peacefulness while he recovered.

But at last he rouse himself, urged by a growing interest in the neighbourhood, and his friend the ex-hussar's unorthodox mode of life.

"That was a wonderful dinner you produced, Ted," he remarked. "I'm feeling quite in sympathy with a City Alderman on Lord Mayor's Day just now. How do you manage it out here?"

"Sixpence is a good cook-boy," was the laconic reply. "By the way, I wish when you get back you would impress upon the mater I don't starve. She seems to think I live on locusts and wild honey."

"I might also impress upon her that you are well attended. How many house-boys have you?"

Again the slow smile. "Well, they say round about, that I have a house-boy for every hour in the day. Of course, I haven't, but I'm bound to admit there have been occasions when circumstances took me to the kitchen, and I couldn't get in for boys. It's not entirely my fault, though, for I find my cook and head house-boy each has a personal piccanin to wait on him, besides the piccanins I employ myself. A sort of valet, you know, though hardly to attend to their clothes."

"And what about neighbours? who is there beside Miss Webberley's redoubtable trio?"

"Besides 'The Irresponsibles?' Well, there are several good fellows farming round about; and one or two mining."

"No ladies, I suppose?"

"Yes, there is one, on the very next farm. She came out as a bride a year ago. I must take you to see her soon. I'm afraid she finds it very dull. She never actually says so, but it's really a devil of a life for a mere girl, and her husband doesn't happen to be the type of man to enliven things."

"No? What's he like?"

"Oh, a chap with a chronic grievance. He's clever after a fashion, and he's a gentleman, but he's the sort of man who is always either cursing his luck; or going to the other extreme, and patting himself on the back over nothing. I think what he really wants is a bit of ragging."

"And the bride?"

"She's a little Devonshire girl. Lost her mother just before she came out, and fretted a good bit on the quiet, I think; though I don't believe her husband ever saw it. I sometimes take her for a ride, and she grows quite merry after about half an hour. Another time she'll sit as silent as a mouse, and look straight before her with big, solemn eyes, and you wonder what the deuce she's thinking about."

"I'm surprised you haven't taken a wife yourself, Ted. It must be awfully lonely sometimes."

"A wife here! Oh Lord, no! what in the world should I do with her, or she do with herself? I'll think about matrimony when I'm tired of Rhodesia; not before." There was a pause; and then he added: "But what about you? Doctors generally marry early."

"Make a business of it, so to speak, like clergymen?"

"Yes. Does the idea hurt your artistic soul?"

"I could not imagine myself marrying without love, and yet"—musingly—"what is love? Is it sentiment? or should there be no sentiment in a strong, healthy love?"

Ted smiled quietly as he pulled at his pipe. He suddenly felt himself transported to their joint study at Harrow, where, while he lounged with his feet on the mantelpiece, the young, brainy Lawson had been wont to stride up and down the room, airing his budding views. He would not have stayed him for anything, either then or now, and as in the old schoolboy days, merely interjected an encouraging "Well, go on."

The doctor leaned forward to clean out his pipe. "And what is sentiment?" he continued, as if there had been no gap. "Are they different or the same. It is a problem in psychology I feel I could write an article about, and yet I haven't a notion how I should unravel it, or if I should succeed in unravelling it at all."

He finished his pipe, and refilled it before he proceeded, then he lounged lower in his comfortable chair, and rested his feet high above his head against one of the verandah

supports. "Sentiment or love," he remarked argumentatively, "what are they? or what is the difference? I am puzzled to define the former, but I think one might say sentiment is a broad foundation for the emotions, pity, pride, even love; though I think love would never grow to anything great on such a foundation."

"A bit ambiguous," suggested the practical Ted. "Now have a try at love."

"Love," said the doctor unhesitatingly, "I should certainly assert to be the centre of all human actions; from the azimuth of avarice to the zenith of self-sacrifice. If I have one thing against it, it is that it destroys beauty and soundness."

"Destroys"—incredibly. "Nonsense, man! Those are the very things it creates."

"I speak, possibly, from a professional standpoint. Quite half my patients' nervous ailments can be attributed more or less to love; and only to one in a million can ill health be said to be becoming."

"But you must admit it cuts both ways. Why, even I—matter-of-fact as I am—have seen plain girls grow almost beautiful, and fatuous young asses develop positive intelligence."

"I've seen fatuous young asses, as you call them, become positively imbecile," said the doctor drily.

Ted got up with a laugh and shook himself.

"We're disturbing the peace of the night," he said. "Let's discuss whiskies and soda instead. I won't say anything about plans for to-morrow, because my own idea of a restful holiday is to make no plan at all, but just to do whatever I feel inclined at the moment. If you like to make plans, I'll fall in with them, but I won't help you unless you get bored."

"Heaven-born pal," contentedly. "I admit I've been dreading every moment the sentence, 'What shall we do to-morrow?' I'd almost as soon you asked me 'what shall we do to be saved?' My own idea of combining both, is to sit or lie on this verandah, for the next three days."

"You shall," said Ted, while he poured out some whisky, and at that particular moment, Destiny, the mysterious, the merciless, shot her first bolt. Before the host had finished adding the soda to his guest's glass, a nigger staggered up panting, and held out a note.

"What's the matter?" asked Ted sharply.

The nigger gasped out that he had brought the note from the Boss Long-man, who had told him to run the whole way.

While he was speaking, Ted tore open the envelope, and held the hastily-scribbled sheet up to the lamplight, showing through the window.

"Good God!" he exclaimed under his breath.

The doctor roused himself. "What is it?" he asked.

Without hesitation Ted read, stumbling a little over the hurried, illegible writing:

"DEAR BURNETT,

"My wife has been taken very ill suddenly. You told me you had a doctor friend coming out to stay with you to-day. Please come over as quickly as possible, if he is with you. I am here quite alone, and am nearly distracted. For Heaven's sake do not lose a moment you can possibly help,

"OSWALD GRANT."

The doctor was on his feet before the reader finished. "So much for my glorious peacefulness! Fancy being called out at night straight away in the heart of the wilderness. What do you suppose is the matter? I always said life had a keen sense of humour, and at this moment I feel like the victim of it."

But Burnett did not smile. "I'm afraid it is serious," he said, "I know she was not expecting to be ill for two or three weeks yet, you understand?—and there's no nurse or woman to be got at within twelve miles."

Then, without giving his friend time to speak, he added: "You must take my horse, and one of my boys must run and show you the way; I shall follow on foot, and if it's really serious, send the horse back to meet me with a message, and I'll ride straight away to town." After which he hurried off, to get the horse; and ten minutes later the tired doctor was riding out into the blackness, as fast as the boy beside him could run.

CHAPTER V

A DESPERATE FIGHT

"SHE has had some shock during the day?" The doctor spoke in a calm, compelling, professional voice. His face was intensely grave. He was afraid to be out of the sick room for a moment, but he had to get at the truth from this somewhat incoherent, distracted husband, and for some unaccountable reason the sufferer grew worse if he was anywhere near her.

"She has only been fretting; no shock at all, I assure you. I was down on the lands and my sowing hindered me rather later than usual, and——"

"Yes, yes," quietly. "She has been fretting. Can you tell me what about?"

"Only because her pony died. Is she very ill? What are we to do? This dreadful country! Everything was arranged for the right time, you understand; but who was to dream she would be taken ill like this?"

"There is no occasion to alarm yourself unnecessarily. She is in a high fever now, but it may pass off. I will scribble a line to Captain Burnett, and he will ride at once to Salisbury, and bring out a nurse. You need not fear any want of attention. I——" he hesitated, taking a mental measure of his man, "I am considered clever with these cases, and I will do all that could possibly be done."

They were standing at the half-closed door, and the piteous voice inside commenced again its low wailing. "You had better not come in," the doctor said, "as I must try and soothe her, and it is best not to have too many about. I will call you instantly if any dangerous symptoms set in."

So Oswald Grant went back to the sitting-room and sat with his head on his arms, while the doctor took his seat beside the sufferer. She was raving continually—now coherently, now mere babbling, now in entreaty.

A passion of pain seemed to envelop her, and flood-gates

to be bursting in all directions, letting out their torrent of longing and suffering.

The expression on the doctor's face as he listened grew to be something that one felt a painter might almost break his heart over his incompetence to reproduce. It was the expression one would dream of vaguely upon the face of the All Pitying. With her beautiful, sun-kissed hair, straying in tendrils over the pillow and over her white forehead, and that look of infinite pleading and suffering in her eyes, she seemed to the tender-hearted doctor like some beautiful child in pain holding out its arms to him.

He had been totally unprepared. As his horse stumbled along the rough pathway in the dark, though he had not hesitated an instant to obey the call, he was conscious of a sense of resentment. To start right away like this with an unsought patient, and no capable nurse, was really rather too much for his philosophy.

But when he had stood a few minutes by the bedside, and looked at the feverish, tossing, beautiful head on the pillow, he knew only two things: he was thankful he was there, and she should not die if human skill could avail.

So through the long, interminable hours he battled alone with the arch-fiend, while all his own weariness of body and mind passed from him like a dream, merging into the one great desire to save her. Yet, in truth, it was terrible. What must the long year have held to bring her to this state of mental suffering? As he listened to her raving, he half wondered the angels of God had not come down and fetched her away long ago. Now it was gleams of the old life that had evidently been her heaven. Now it was heart-broken yearnings for the mother, who must have been friend, sister, and all in all. Now it was whispered, dreamy murmurings of the sea. Now it was broken, breathless beseechings to take her away from the dead kopjes that were stifling and suffocating her. Now heart-rending sobs for her beloved lost Mischief.

Once, half raising herself, she held out her hand to him and smiled divinely.

"Who are you?" she said. "I like your face so much. Who are you? You won't go away again, will you?" She glanced uneasily round the room, and then ran on in a low voice: "It's so dreadful being alone here day after day—day after day. I've tried to like it. I've done every-

thing I possibly could, but it doesn't seem any use. Am I very ungrateful and wicked?"

He was caressing the little hand in his gently, and as she waited, he answered in his low, soothing voice: "No, you could not do more than try. You have been very brave, but you must try to keep quiet and sleep now."

But she ran on thrillingly: "It was the sea I missed so dreadfully. You can't think what these lifeless, monotonous kopjes, and all the dried-up grass is to anyone who has always had the sea, and loves it beyond everything. I always feel they are mocking at me." An expression of anguish crossed her face. "But the sea loved me. Oh! I can't tell you how it loved me! The gulls on the cliffs knew me, and all the fishermen, and all the children. I used to go out in their boats with them to fish, and I could sail a boat myself quite well. He has never understood; he never will . . ." Again she glanced round fearfully. "You must never tell him I said so, but he never understands anything except his own feelings. I could have borne it if there had been someone who understood to talk to. But there is scarcely ever anyone at all, and the silence nearly kills me. I used to talk to Mischief, because he knew all about it. But he's dead now—did you know?"

She lay back wearily on the pillow and put out her other hand to him. "You must never, never tell him I told you, but last week he kicked him brutally, and that's why I can't bear him with me to-night. It isn't very wrong of me, is it? You are not shocked? I like your face so much, I shouldn't like to shock you."

Again he soothed her tenderly, and bade her try and sleep.

"He's like that," she ran on; "he doesn't mean to be unkind; he's a dreadfully good man, really, but he's so irritable and short-sighted; he never truly understands anything outside himself. I know he thinks I ought to be happy here—and so I would if I could, but it all hurts so dreadfully, I can't help wanting to die sometimes. Perhaps I shall to-night, and I don't mind; I think it would be better so. He would soon forget me, and then he could marry someone more sensible, who wouldn't break her heart over the deadness."

"No, no," the doctor's voice was suddenly vibrating with feeling. In such a mood he felt she might drift beyond his aid.

"You mustn't talk in that way or think in that way. It is wrong for one thing, and it is foolish! Everything is going to be brighter now. Surely you understand that. When you have your little one you will forget everything but how good it is."

She looked up at him wistfully. "But I'm afraid for him too," she breathed. "It isn't a very kind world, and he might be unhappy; I couldn't bear him to be unhappy."

"He won't be unhappy if he has you. For his sake, more than for any other reason, you must be very brave. You wouldn't like him to have to face it all alone?"

"No; oh, no!" and then she seemed to sink into a sort of stupor. When she roused again, it was the lost Mischief in her mind, and she wept piteously. He supported her in his arms with ineffable tenderness, and his touch seemed to soothe her.

"How good you are," she breathed. "Don't go away. I can't bear the loneliness again just yet." She dozed off, still leaning against him, and he was afraid to move lest he should disturb her. The quietness brought her husband to the door, and at his low knock the doctor gently disengaged himself and went to open it.

"Can I come in?" Oswald asked, and stepped quietly to the bedside. Almost immediately the sufferer's eyes opened, and rested on him without recognition, but with something like fear and aversion. She started up wildly. "Where has he gone?" she said. "Oh, where is he? He promised to stay with me." She fell back weeping. "Mummy," she sobbed; "oh, mummy darling, we were so happy together, you and I, with the sea and the fishermen—why did you go away? Why did you let me come out here to break my heart?" She wept unrestrainedly, and the doctor had to lead the anxious watcher away before he could soothe her.

"I will be brave, mother," she kept saying. "Oh, I will! I will! Only you don't know how it all hurts, and I'm so tired; and Mischief is dead; and Oswald doesn't understand how I loved all the things at home. He loves this country, but it stifles me. I can't breathe among these kopjes, and there is never anyone to help me."

So the dreadful night wore on, and the dawn brought no healing. Would he ever save her? As the hours passed his first fighting instinct became an overwhelming force. He must save her. She must *not* die.

But it was not till the first gleam of sunrise lit the sky that the longed-for sound of hushed voices told him Ted Burnett had come back, bringing help.

It was not till the last lingering rays of sunset flowed red across the kopjes that the tired doctor left his post, and brought to the two anxious men on the verandah the joyful tidings that a man was born into the world, and his mother would not die.

Then he sat down in a chair and buried his face in his hands. Now it was over he realized for the first time what the fight had been, what healing had gone out of him.

"Can you come home now?" It was Ted's voice roused him, and the touch of his kindly hand on his shoulder.

"No, I won't leave yet. Can I lie on a bed here for a few hours?"

He looked ghastly, and his friend felt wrung with remorse.

"Of course you can. Can't I get you anything? What would you like?"

The doctor smiled whimsically. "Sleep," he said. "Sleep and a Forgetting."

CHAPTER VI

"THE IRRESPONSIBLES"

THE Irresponsibles sat on the only table in the house, and made such inroads into a substantial cake in their midst, that it seemed unlikely so much as a single currant would survive; at the same time, one felt there was every possibility of it being "though lost to sight, to memory dear" to the three, who, in the lightness of their hearts at actually once more possessing a cake, were undoubtedly throwing caution to the winds.

Not that Rhodesia is devoid of cakes; they can even be bought untinned. But The Irresponsibles always forgot the order when anyone went to town, and they had never yet struck a koko-boy who could concoct anything in the cake line they could by any possibility eat. Moreover, Dinah chanced to be wrestling with the Mashona language in the kitchen, so the opportunity was too propitious to be overlooked, and the three ate solemnly on.

The Irresponsibles rejoiced in the homely names of Billy,

Beauty and Jim, the latter also being known as the U. B., which must blushingly be owned to signify the Ugly Bug, and was chosen to further distinguish him from The Beauty. Of course, they had surnames, but scarcely anyone ever used them, and some people had never heard them.

Dinah wrote them down her first evening in case she wanted them at any future date and they had all forgotten. The paper ran thus :

Beauty—alias Beau, *alias* Bertram Reginald Sinclair. Dreamy-eyed, angelic-voiced, ethereal-smiled, Impostor ;

Jim—alias The U. B., *alias* The Ugly Bug—James Horace Reade. Solid, thick-headed, scantily-clad, Angel ;

Billy Pink'un—alias William De Eresby Webberley. Weakly witty, deplorably vain, Hot-Stuff ;

which somewhat remarkable document was duly pinned on the wall for the edification of the uninitiated.

When they had stealthily and bravely tackled the very last piece of cake, Dinah's voice reached them in piercing accents from the kitchen.

" Billy ! " she called. " What is the Mashona for ' Blithering Idiot,' because if I don't call your orang-outang of a cook-boy one I shall burst ! "

The next moment she announced her advent by throwing her cookery book with some force at Billy's head ; whereupon Beauty discreetly hid the empty cake dish behind his person.

" What have I done ? what is the matter ? " cried Billy, with a hurt, ingenuous air that would have done credit to a maligned saint.

" Matter ! " snorted Dinah. " How in the world can I housekeep for you with a bally ape for a cook ? "

" He's not really an ape," seriously. " He only looks like it. He's a genuine, pedigree Mashona."

" What's he been up to ? " asked Jim, edging guiltily nearer to Beauty to help hide that tell-tale plate.

" Pedigree Chimpanzee ! " scornfully. " Did you engage him as a curio or a scarecrow ? Here have I been talking to him for half an hour and made about as much impression as if he were a Hindu idol ! "

"That's quite likely," quoth Billy sweetly.

"You said he could speak English. He says he can himself; so I asked him what he could make for dinner. He says, with a grin like a Cheshire cat, 'Me makee steakie pie, Missis.' Naturally I jumped at that. 'Good,' says I, 'I'll tell you how to make it specially well.' Then I opened my cookery book and read to him, very impressively, an elaborate description of a pie suitable for a Lord Mayor's banquet, glazing and flavouring and everything. When I had finished, he grinned more foolishly than ever, and said, 'Where steakie, Missis?' I stared openmouthed, and then said as indifferently as I could, 'Oh! of course, I forgot the steak.'"

"And then you wanted to call *him* a blithering idiot?" said Billy, meditatively.

"But what's to be done?" she asked. "He can't talk anything, and he can't cook anything, and he can't look anything, and the odour of him maketh me sick. We must get a new cook-boy at once."

"There aren't any to be had. We go without cooking generally. Don't you know how to cook?"

"No, I don't!" with emphasis. "Haven't a notion. Couldn't cook a cabbage to save my life. I nearly grew grey over that cake. It was quite a mental strain not to forget anything. You won't get another in a hurry, so you'd better be very careful with that."

"That's what we thought," said Jim. "We've put it away safely so that it can't get lost, or stale, or anything."

Dinah looked from one to the other.

"If you've——" she began; then Billy interrupted.

"Why don't you buy a nose machine, Di?" he asked cheerfully. "They're not very expensive. I never saw anything in my life quite so aggressive as the upward soar of your nasal organ against the sky."

"Anyway, it's better than your addled, fuddled, soppy brain," smoothing down the offending feature affectionately; then: "Why is Beauty looking so specially angelic? He must have committed some deadly crime to be wearing an expression like that."

Beauty smiled ineffably.

"Quite the reverse," he said. "I have done my part nobly by the precious cake; at——" after a moment's consideration—"no small inconvenience to myself."

Jim raised a shout at that, and clapped him hard on the back.

"Same here," he cried. "If I don't let out my belt this very moment——"

Dinah took a step nearer.

"If you have——" she began again.

"Was the cook-boy having you over the pie, do you think, Dinah?" asked Billy, still unperturbed.

"Where's that cake?" in terrible accents.

"Beauty, where's the cake?" Billy asked in surprise.

"Jim, where's the cake?" echoed Beauty in like tones.

"Pink 'un, where is the cake?" implored Jim in his turn.

Dinah sat down suddenly.

"But you couldn't eat it all," she gasped. "It's a sheer impossibility. It must have weighed three pounds!"

"Quite," murmured Beauty, with a sigh.

"You don't know what can be achieved by three stalwart Rhodesians, who haven't passed the time of day with a cake for years," from Billy.

Then Dinah began to laugh.

"You awful scoundrels!" she said. "I wouldn't have your waistbands for something. No wonder Beauty looks pathetic. You might have left me a scrap. It's the last cake this abode will see for some time—at any rate, in a whole condition. In future I shall dole you out a fixed quantity each, and keep the rest under lock and key."

"We don't possess such a thing," remarked Jim.

"You'll have to put it away with your Sunday hat," said Billy.

"Haven't got one. Never could endure Sunday clothes. By the way, are there Sundays in Rhodesia, and how do you know them?"

"Rather," from Beauty. "We have two ways of knowing them. One is by the pudding, and the other is by Jim. Every seventh day the boy makes a sort of messy jam concoction, and Jim clothes himself with some pretence to decency, and then we know it is the Sabbath."

"And do you ever know the date of the month?"

"Oh! we guess that by the moon. You see, it doesn't as a rule matter to within a week."

"Good heavens! you'll lose your identity next, and grow old without knowing it."

"We often forget our names," Jim told her. "The last time two B. S. A. Police came round with a paper to be signed by the farmers, we couldn't sign it because we couldn't any of us remember our surnames; and when they last took the census, we all put ourselves at fifteen, and wrote at the side that we hadn't the smallest idea of the right figure, but that as a man is said to be as old as he feels, we had declared accordingly."

"And I wonder what you put for occupation?" with fine irony.

"What should we put but farming?" asked Billy in a hurt tone.

"Farming!" with a light laugh. "Why, you know about as much of farming as I do of cooking. I've not seen you do anything in the week I've been here, but laze and smoke and sleep."

"My dear child," with feigned indignation, "hasn't Jim been ploughing all morning, and Beauty been musing by the mealies, and your humble servant planting vegetables?"

"Ploughing," broke in Jim, "why, I'm nearly crippled with it. Look here, you fellows," resolutely, "those donkeys of Elliot's aren't any catch. I'm fed up with them. Why, they can't even stand up. Every two minutes one of the bally things collapses, and then you have to put your arms round it and lift it bodily to its feet. I've embraced a few odd things in my life," with a sudden twinkle, "but I never thought I'd come down to a moke! You can take the next turn, Billy, and I'll plant vegetables."

"No; Beauty can have a go, and I'll muse by the mealies."

"But I can't use the long whip," from Beauty plaintively; "it always seems to finish up round my own head. Let's send the Pedigree Chimpanzee down, as he can't cook, and stop up here till it gets cool."

"Well, it's a pity to get hungry," put in Dinah, "because goodness only knows when there'll be anything to eat, except 'bread and point' on the verandah!"

"Are we to point at the empty cake dish?" asked Jim.

"No—point to England, and imagine the menu at 'Prince's' or 'The Savoy.'"

They accordingly settled themselves on the verandah,

and Dinah inveigled a cigarette out of her brother to keep the flies off.

"Do you know, Di," he remarked, as she lit it from his, "you always remind me of a yarn I heard at Cape Town. A chap and his wife, out at Green Point, had a native cook who would never do anything at all but just the cooking. When she wasn't cooking she always sat up a tree in the garden, and nothing would induce her to come down before it was time to cook the next meal. This, of course, didn't matter very much, only she happened to be so ugly that the neighbours were constantly taking her for an orang-outang, and getting ready to shoot her, and finally they had to have a huge placard printed and hung on her favourite tree——"

It was in the scrimmage that followed, while Dinah tried to pull his hair out by the roots, that Ted Burnett and the doctor rode up to pay their first call.

"Help! Help!" called Billy when he saw them. "If that's a doctor-man you've got with you, Burnett, bring him along quick. Dinah's gone mad."

Beauty called up a piccanin to take the horses, and the two visitors climbed the somewhat rustic steps on to the still more rustic stoep.

"I began to wonder when you were coming!" Dinah said charmingly, holding out her hand to the doctor. "How is Rhodesia treating you? I'm having a positively appalling time. I wonder you haven't heard my cries for help at Ambleside."

"Really! Why, I'm living in the lap of luxury. Never had such a retinue of attendants in my life."

"Of course not," from Billy. "Burnett engages every bit of cook or house-boy flesh that comes along, and the consequence is we have to put up with—well, Dinah says he's a Chimpanzee."

"I'm very sorry," exclaimed Ted. "Are you really wanting a cook-boy?"

"Are we wanting one?" cried Dinah. "Why, we'd all fall on your neck and weep for gladness if you could get us anything that could cook—male or female."

"Well, I should like one at a time best," quoth the artful Ted, "and, of course, ladies first."

"Don't be a fool, Burnett," was Billy's advice. "She's capable of taking a handful of hair in the process. But send us a cook if you can, for the love of Heaven; then perhaps

she won't use such horrible language. A woman who can't cook is a pretty poor thing, but a woman who uses the language Dinah does ought to be muzzled."

"Can't help it," announced Dinah, blowing smoke rings very neatly; "badly brought up, I suppose. I can't even darn a stocking. I always stitch up the holes with cotton; and not for all the gold in Egypt could I sew a boot on to a button. Aren't you immensely interested in Rhodesian farming, Dr. Lawson?" turning suddenly to the doctor. "It's so complicated that I'm only afraid these three farmers here will die of fat-headedness caused by swollen brains. Does Captain Burnett work like a galley slave from sunrise to sunset?"

"Does Captain Burnett work?" chimed in Billy expressively. "Oh, Lord! that's good! Does Captain Burnett work? . . . Why, he wouldn't know himself working, and we should certainly all think he was going to die. No, my dear Dinah, Ted Burnett is the proud possessor of two good horses, and his farming consists chiefly in keeping them exercised, bossing up his retinue of house-boys, and shooting. Is there anything for lunch, because if so, we might adjourn."

"You must come and see for yourself, Miss Webberley," Burnett said to her. "Because The Irresponsibles never do any work themselves they will not allow that anyone else does; but the fact remains, that whereas all their mealies are choked with Black Jacks, only half mine are."

"My dear chap, you have two boys to the acre more—that's why. It's really disgraceful that you have a Black Jack on the farm."

"Might I ask if a Black Jack is anything like a Pedigree Chimpanzee?" inquired Dinah.

"Hardly," from Jim. "Black Jacks are the grass seeds that stick in your clothes. A special invention of the Powers of Darkness to vex the Children of Light."

"What! those horrid little black grass seeds?" with sudden enlightenment; "that make you look as if you had been dipped first in a gum-pot and then a tea-caddy!"

"Exactly," said Burnett, looking amused. Then he asked: "What's become of Beauty?"

They all looked round, and at that moment Beauty appeared, with his lazy, indolent grace and fascinating smile. In reply to their questions he said:

"I've only been making a curry of some tinned meat."
"Have you?" announced Dinah emphatically. "Well, I made one an hour ago, and the P. C. seemed to have a leaning in that direction when I left him to recover from my language." She turned to the doctor. "Looks much more as if he had been writing an epic poem, doesn't he? Did you ever know anything more incongruous than that seraphic smile and tinned-meat curry! But, come along; if we've got to worry through three separate curry dishes we'd better make a start. I hope you won't mind if you get landed with a tin plate, because there are only three crockery ones, and we don't have any favouritism. Also, the vegetables will be handed round in tin basins by a nigger who scents the summer air in an unique fashion of his own."

They took their seats at the one and only table—Jim being obliged to have recourse to a packing-case, because the whole establishment only boasted five chairs, and meanwhile Dinah rattled on:

"Firearms and reptiles overrun this abode," she was telling the doctor. "Rifles, pistols, revolvers, guns and Mausers lie about in all directions—the only wonder to me is that we don't continually trip over dead bodies. I never saw such an assortment of weapons before, and Heaven only knows who or what they want to shoot! As for the insects and reptiles! I tell you I daren't get out of bed in the night to save my life, for you never know what prehistoric mammal has strolled in while you were asleep. I make Blockhead look under the bed every morning before I show my nose above the clothes. Oh! he's a treasure, is Blockhead! I taught him to knock on the door before he came in, and now he always knocks as he goes out as well. And when he cleans my boots he laces them right up to the top, all wrong, and then ties the laces in knots, that almost reduce me to tears. The first time I asked for my hot bath water he brought it in a kettle, and poured it into the slop pail, and when I shouted 'Bath' at him he went away, and brought me a soup plate of porridge! But, touching the insects and reptiles, have you seen the Ballet Girl in green tights? They call it a Chinese God here, because it is generally in an attitude of devotion; but I've rechristened it, because if you touch it, it gives a high kick and bites you. Then there's the Scratch—a long thing, exactly alike both ends, and

without any shape at all. 'Marr'd in the making,' I should think. And there's a chameleon on the creeper that swears horribly—sort of fire and brimstone spitting business—and the centipedes and tarantulas and snakes and frogs— Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Why did I leave my native land! . . . Have some more curry? There is a pudding to follow, but the P. C. dropped it on the floor, and I don't think the added flavour will be an improvement, as it is a mud floor, and the beautiful, benevolent boys throw all the dregs on it."

After lunch they lazed again on the verandah, and then the doctor and Dinah went for a stroll, while the others discussed the latest sport yarns.

Dinah rattled on for a bit until they found a seat in the shade and sat down.

"Did you ever see anything so grotesque as a Rhodesian sheep?" she remarked. "They have such an unfinished appearance. They look as if they did not know whether they were meant to be sheep or goats, and didn't much want to be either."

He followed her gaze, but made no comment, and she suddenly asked him:

"Well, is it doing you good? Are you glad you came?"

"Both," with a little smile. "And the accident of my coming probably saved a life—two lives."

She looked up in surprise, and he saw that she had heard nothing of the events at "Killarney," so in a few short sentences he told her of her only woman neighbour.

"How odd that we never heard!" she exclaimed. "But I fancy Billy and the others haven't any great liking for Mr. Grant, and see very little of him. Rather rough on you, to be at it again directly you land."

He shrugged his shoulders and a slightly anxious expression crossed his face.

"You must go and see her," was all he said. "I fancy she's had rather a hard time out here, and needs cheering. She's too weak for visitors at present, but try and get over at the end of the week."

Dinah looked round on the far-reaching kopjes under the blazing sky.

"How long has she been out?"

"Just a year."

"Poor kid! It's all very well for a visit, but for my

part I'd sooner sweep a room in a living world than be a queen in a dead one—like this would soon become."

"It's very peaceful," and the doctor heaved a little sigh of content. He was thinking of those crowded hospital wards at home, where, week in, week out, he strove unwearyingly with death and disease. He was thinking of the crowded tenements not far from his West End home, where he sometimes went voluntarily on his merciful errand of healing; visits unknown to any but the poor sufferers who looked upon him almost as God. But Dinah broke in on his meditations abruptly:

"Peaceful!" she echoed. "Peaceful! And you're still a young man! What do you and I want with peacefulness yet! Don't grow old before you need. For me! . . ." she stood up, with her hands behind her head, and her graceful figure clearly outlined against the sky. "I want movement, and change, for years to come. I hate peacefulness—it's only stagnation. I want to see and experience everything—everything!"

His eyes roved over her, and he noted afresh how trim and smart and attractive she was, in spite of her undeniable plainness, and he mused, a little abstractedly, on the superior power of personality over beauty, when she interrupted him with a quick gesture and asked:

"Is it wise for me to go and see Mrs. Grant? I can't dissimulate, you know. I couldn't, for instance, even remotely suggest that life in the wilderness was an endurable thing. It isn't—and somehow or other I should be certain to blurt it out."

The doctor smiled, and there was something behind his eyes that made Dinah a trifle thoughtful.

"I don't think you need hesitate now," he said simply; "she has a little son."

CHAPTER VII

THE DOCTOR MUSES

A WEEK later Oswald Grant was again sowing. Up and down, up and down the long furrows with untiring regularity, his seed in a calico apron tied round his neck, and his right hand swinging outwards like clock-work.

The great event being over, the great danger past, he

had slipped back instantly into his old habit of routine, which left little time for lazing on the verandah,—or a shoot—or indeed, any pleasure at all, such as graced the happy-go-lucky, contented lives of his neighbours. It was usually said of Grant that he worked harder than any three of his neighbours put together, and though he was not above grumbling at the amount he had to do—or thought he had—he managed to derive a good deal of self-satisfaction from the contemplation of his own great industry. Coupled with this he also found a comfortable self-glorying in the fact that he was a staunch teetotaler, in a land where the majority of men drank more than was good for them. “The fellows in town can’t get over my never touching anything but lime-juice,” he would say to his wife, in a complacent voice, when he came home on a Saturday evening. “I like to see their eyes open with surprise. They want to maintain a man can’t live in this country without spirits, but I spoil their argument for them.”

Joyce would listen in her usual quiet manner, but that clever little brain of hers, which was developing an uncomfortable habit of introspection, would probe round the accompanying fact that he was undoubtedly a man with a chronic grievance, who made practically no friends, and never allowed himself time to enjoy life. She wondered if, perhaps, supposing he drank a little less lime-juice and an occasional drop of whisky, he would succeed in taking a brighter view of things, and be regarded in a more kindly spirit by their neighbours. Of course, no one had ever criticized him to her, but she was shrewd enough to gather from his own remarks that he was the reverse of popular, and she secretly suspected he was not unusually a laughing-stock among the light-hearted, instead of the good example he fondly believed. She remembered sometimes, how, after the rush and hurry of the engagement and wedding, her first cold douche had come with a certain interview with his mother. She knew very little about men at all, having had no brother and no men friends, but her natural instinct had been set on edge somewhat by that grotesque interview, in which, after expatiating upon her good fortune in securing such a husband, the weepy, tremulous lady had finished: “Ah! my child, he is indeed a noble man. I have only been afraid sometimes that, like his poor, dear father, he might

prove too good to live. In this dreadful age of boasted indifference to the Word of God, when almost all young men smoke and drink recklessly, what a beautiful sight it is to see such a man ; and know absolutely that, whatever befalls, he will drink nothing stronger than lime-juice ; and yet, in the strength of it, carry the citadel and confound the enemies of the Lord. You must, indeed, tend him dutifully as his dear wife and handmaiden—even as Sarah served Abraham." She had stroked Joyce's hand while she talked, and was pleased to notice the girl's rapt attention. But, as a matter of fact, Joyce was only conscious of an extraordinary sense of numbness. She could not understand herself in the least. She had a notion that she ought to be grateful and impressed, that that was most certainly what was expected of her ; but instead, there was only this growing numbness, and a dreadful feeling somewhere in the back of her mind that she wanted to laugh. Encouraged, however, by her quiet attention, the fond and proud mother proceeded : " I feel, you know," in a rapt voice, " that it is a direct answer to prayer. His poor, dear father, who was such a good man, although he had the misfortune to be—er"—with a little hesitation—" connected with a brewery—er—and I, prayed together regularly that he might be saved from strong drink and strong language, and grow up a noble man." A sudden little demon, wriggling in Joyce's brain, caused her to ask with apparent innocence : " Did you pray for Reggie, too ? " The lips of the proud mother grew a little rigid. " Reggie is perhaps our cross," she said, " that we might not be too set up with our eldest boy. But what I want to impress upon you, my dear, is the necessity and beauty of prayer. Oswald has been accustomed to hearing family prayers read with the servants morning and evening all his life, and I should not like him to miss it in a home of his own ; so I have bought you a nice, simple book of family prayers, and I hope you will use them morning and evening, and let those poor, misguided niggers pray daily with you."

Joyce was only nineteen when she was married, and she had never left the little Devonshire fishing village in her life, and consequently, a good many latent powers had had no chance to develop. When she found herself on a big ship, attracting no small attention, in spite of the fact that she shrank from rather than sought it, she began

to wake up; or, in other words, to discover and use faculties that had lain dormant. A partial result of this was that she dropped the Book of Prayers overboard before they reached Cape Town; and so far differed from her mother-in-law that she wished the noble Oswald would show some slight symptoms of ordinary faultiness, instead of being so high-minded and so uninteresting. His horror at the ladies who enjoyed their after-dinner cigarette was really pathetic, and on one dreadful occasion, when a pair of rosebud lips opened to enunciate a very forcible "Damn!" he hastily moved their chairs to another part of the deck:

"That is a word I have never said in my life," he remarked sententiously, "and I hope I never shall."

And Joyce looked across the blue waters, and wondered whether it was very dreadful to feel secretly so convinced he would be a much nicer man all round if he said it sometimes for a change. She thought a little wistfully of the renegade Reggie's light-hearted charm. She had only seen him once, but he had made her laugh almost for the first time since her mother died, and they had taken to each other at once.

Later on her husband had held forth, at considerable length, upon his innumerable shortcomings, his incurable extravagance, reckless self-pleasing, utter want of consideration, and hopeless badness generally.

"I have done all I can for him," he finished, in a hurt voice, "but he only laughs at my counsels, and continues his down-hill course."

"But he has such a delightful, boyish manner," Joyce had ventured; "I really don't think you need be anxious about him yet. He'll grow wiser when he is older. He is so popular everywhere he is sure to be a little spoilt."

Her husband had regarded her almost stonily for a moment, before he replied: "My dear Joyce, you are rather young to express such a decided opinion on the subject—I have every cause to be anxious. Why! only last week I heard of him being intoxicated after a cricket dinner. It is too disgraceful—I feel it most keenly. Just think of it—intoxicated, positively intoxicated. He is a disgrace to his illustrious name—and I told him so pretty strongly."

Joyce's long lashes hid her eyes, as she returned to the book she was reading, because she suddenly remembered

a remark of the black sheep's concerning that same illustrious name.

"You're too blooming proud of your ancestors," he had told his brother flippantly. "If you'd take the trouble to inquire you'd find one old lady was hanged for sheep-stealing; one old fool married his cook, because she was the only person in the world who could make a curry to suit him; and about half a dozen of them died through over-exerting themselves, trying to catch imaginary rats, running up imaginary walls."

But it had been some months before the real disillusionment set in. Hopeful by nature, she had held bravely to the belief that the fault lay largely in herself, and by and by she would be better able to appreciate her husband's many excellencies, and enter heartily into his Rhodesian projects. And when hope began to die she was brave still; hiding from him to her utmost endeavour the terrible ache for home and the blue seas of Devon, which grew and grew instead of diminishing. At the time of her critical illness he had been obliged to see something of it, but it had entirely passed from his mind afterwards; and now, as he once more proceeded with his daily routine, he remembered only the latest evidence of the goodwill of Providence towards him. Mother and child had come back from the gates of death, and he was the proud possessor of a son and heir to carry on that thrice wonderful name. There were moments when his complacency knew no bounds, and he found himself repeating vaguely certain words of the Psalmist's, when he proclaims that the Lord shall prosper the way of the righteous. Up and down, up and down the long furrows—very like a Biblical picture himself—he sowed his seed, and scattered with it dreams for the future, in which he saw himself an old man full of honours, charitable and righteous beyond the ordinary man, unmistakably and undeniably of the Elect.

On the verandah, up at the house, Joyce was enjoying her first afternoon out of her bedroom, with the doctor to keep her company, while the nurse explored the adjacent kopjes by way of a change. He sat a little in the background, in a position especially adapted to study her, without letting her perceive it. He hardly knew whether he did it consciously or not—he hardly wanted to know—it was enough that it was heaven-to be there, watching her changing expressions, watching her pathetic rapture over

the atom of humanity on her lap, noting the faint flush returning to her cheeks, and the light to her eyes, and thinking for the thousandth time how beautiful her hair was. He was vaguely aware that something had happened on that first dreadful night, when she had clung to him in paroxysms of weeping, and refused to be comforted except by his caress.

"Don't go away, don't go away," had been her continuous plea, as her little hands clung frantically to his; and when at intervals she had fallen into a restless, feverish sleep, with her head nestling against him, he had held himself rigid, almost to torture, rather than disturb her.

It had seemed once or twice, as if time past and time future fell away from them, leaving them alone in some middle air, where there were no other humans, and no rushing, hurrying, painful existence—only he, in his conscious man's strength, holding her safe from any hurt that might come near. It seemed, even now, too strange to be true. He was still almost staggered by the suddenness of it. Long, long ago it seemed there had been an evening on the verandah with his friend Ted Burnett, when they had talked idly, and planned idle empty hours, and his tired brain had revelled in a sense of utter restfulness, undisturbed by so much as a dream or desire. And in the very midst of his new-found content, regardless, apparently, of the fact that he greatly needed repose, Fate seemed to have taken him by the shoulders and shaken him pitilessly wide awake. It was as though without a word, without a sign, she had suddenly confronted him with his destiny. She had shown him a child-like, exquisite, pain-wrung face, framed in a halo of golden brown hair; wide eyes of agonized pleading that stirred the very depths of his sympathetic soul; and delicate blue-veined hands reached out to him that seemed to clasp themselves round his heart for ever.

Now he sat apart and watched her, and wondered greatly. If it had been his destiny, the entire consciousness of it had not come yet. Up to this there had been chiefly the hand-to-hand fight with the Pale Spectre, and the anxiety that shut out all else. Again and again he had felt she was slipping out of his reach. Again and again he had called mutely upon a Higher Power to give him the skill to save her. That Power—outside himself—which brought him to such baffling barriers, in spite of

his admittedly brilliant brain, and left him so often only bewildered and hopeless. That Power—outside himself—concerning which he openly confessed himself in utter ignorance; which some call Fate, some Providence, and some God.

As he sat—a little apart—watching his rapidly recovering patient, his unresting brain probed a little fantastically the interesting situation. Here was the good, believing man, whom this Power is said to love greatly, in proud and full possession of one of the sweetest girl-wives a man was ever blessed with; and with about as much power of entering into her young, bright nature, and appreciating her, and making her happy, as a waxwork model. Here was the eager, opening, youthful mind and brain reaching out for its share of life—whom, assuredly, this Unknown Power must love also—heading, apparently, for an abyss of disillusionment and emptiness. Lastly, here was he, successful, clever, sympathetic, understanding, giving of his best freely and ungrudgingly to all sufferers who came to him, giving in utter unselfishness and unwearyingly the cup of cold water to the very least of these—though not consciously in any name but that of Humanity. Here was he, with the thought sown as a seed in his strong heart, how he would like to teach this child what Happiness was, to give her her birthright of Life, in place of cut and dried creeds and aphorisms and a mere husk of a man. What would that Unknown Power do with such a trio, to all three of whom He seemed to owe something.

He was aroused from his reverie suddenly by Joyce's low voice, with its new joy in it.

"Isn't he perfectly wonderful," she was saying. "I always thought new-born babies were so ugly—so red and unfinished looking. Sometimes when I have gone into the fishermen's cottages with mother I have wondered how the poor women could like such little red lumps of flesh. A mother must wear fairy spectacles, I think," with a happy laugh, "because I feel sure you're thinking that my baby is just like all that, and yet, to me, he is more beautiful than the sunlight."

The doctor smiled encouragingly. "Then I've got the fairy spectacles on, too," he said, "for he doesn't look in the least red or unfinished to me. He's one of the prettiest babies I've ever seen."

"It's nice of you to say so—but, after all, it doesn't

really matter. That's the wonderful part, isn't it? If he were just red and ugly I should think him perfect, and prefer him to a seraphim or cherubim."

The doctor's hands moved a little nervously.

"Is he going to make up for Devon's blue seas, and the fisherfolk, and all that?" he asked gently.

Joyce hid her face low over the tiny head, while the tell-tale flush crept over her cheeks.

"Did I say much about them?" she asked. "I have always wanted to ask you."

"You said a good deal," gazing hard at the bowed head.

"Did he hear?" bending lower, and speaking almost in a whisper.

"No, I advised him to stay away. You said it all to me." His blood quickened a little as he felt the sudden birth of a kinship in the short sentence.

She seemed to hesitate painfully a moment, and then added, as if in explanation:

"He had hurt my feelings a little about something just before; it was very silly of me—I hope I didn't show it when I was ill?" She waited, but the doctor was silent.

"Did I send him away?" she asked.

He cleared his throat.

"Not exactly, and there was nothing unusual in it. When one is very ill and feverish one often takes a sort of momentary aversion to some presence." He paused; then added: "I could see it made you restless to have him near, so I easily explained it would be better for you to be quite quiet."

She turned her head, and looked down towards the long furrows, where the lean, stooping figure walked up and down, up and down.

"As long as he wasn't hurt," she said.

The doctor stood up suddenly, and gave himself a little shake.

"No, he wasn't hurt," he replied firmly. "I don't think he noticed it."

"I'm glad," simply; and she kissed the tiny nestling head.

The doctor took a turn down the verandah, and came back.

"I know North Devon," he said; "my people once had a house there for five years; I don't wonder you love it."

She looked up at him gratefully, and in a few minutes they were deep in an entrancing comparison of mutual likes and dislikes of that beloved coast. A lovely colour glowed in her cheeks, and her eyes shone like stars. For a moment, she seemed almost to have forgotten the sleeping infant; while, for the first time for a year, she let a flood of pent-up loving and longing burst through.

"If only my baby could have been born there," she finished wistfully. "I was, you know. I opened my eyes on it all, and I've loved it to distraction ever since. I suppose that's why I've never been able to take to this new land. I can see that it is beautiful, but, after the sea, it all seems so dead. I can't quite explain it, but there is a deadness about kopjes that almost hurts. They wear the same face always, and everything is the same, and one lives like a piece of clock-work, that is wound up to do certain things at certain times for a given period. But the sea is always changing, and there is spring and summer, and autumn and winter in Devon, and the boats going out every day, and coming back with their fish, and the long, perfect days fishing oneself, and all the new babies to see, and the nice old people to talk to, and the hunting in winter, and real Christmases——" She checked herself suddenly, and changed her voice. "But, of course, it will all be different now. I'm not going to be silly and homesick any more. Baby will be sure to love this, and I shall try and see it through his eyes. He's to grow up a thorough little Rhodesian, and be a big man out here some day. There's so little room to achieve in England now. I try to think it's a good future for him—but"—dropping her voice again—"I hope he'll love Devon, too, and care about the sea, because I shall always pray to go back there for good some day."

"Of course he will." The doctor's voice was a little husky. "It will come naturally to him to love it as you do the moment he sees it. Hullo!"—he broke off—"that looks like Miss Webberley talking to your husband; I expect she is coming to see you." He looked at her with a critical, professional air. "Do you know, I think I'll put her off to-day, you are looking unusually tired. You won't be disappointed, will you?"

"Not if you think it best, and will explain to her. Who is that with them?"

"Burnett and her brother. I think I had better go

down to them. I see nurse is just coming—don't hold that young man too long. I shall have to prescribe stated hours, if you will persist in having him continually in your arms," and, with a bright smile, he strode off down the kopje.

Dinah was talking to Oswald, who appeared to be explaining at considerable length, and in blissful ignorance of a certain mischievous light in her eyes, how sowing ought to be done. That is to say, how *he* did it, compared to the average run of uneven, unsatisfactory sowing done by other men. She wore a short, beautifully-cut skirt, and looked remarkably trim and neat in it, but the mischievous twinkle was growing, and a very slight droop of the left eyelid, as the doctor came up, told him she had already pretty thoroughly gauged her communicative companion.

"Mr. Grant is just explaining to me most beautifully the ethics of sowing," she said. "You can't think how interesting it is. Of course, I thought you just chucked the seed about anyhow, and it did the rest itself." She turned back again to her informant: "I have heard a great deal about your skill as a farmer, Mr. Grant. What a boon you must be to all the ignorant farmers round, and to Rhodesia generally."

"I beg your pardon! I beg your pardon!" came most forcibly from the two other men of the party.

"Did I hear you say *ignorant* farmers, Miss Webberley?" added Burnett.

She smiled artlessly.

"Of course, I didn't mean it quite literally, except as regards Billy. Everyone knows he hasn't any notion of farming. I only meant ignorant in comparison to Mr. Grant. He, I have always understood, is a past master."

Oswald Grant turned away with a little pleased smile, blended rather amusingly with a self-deprecating air, and once more there was a suspicious droop about Dinah's left eyelid.

He moved forward, and she followed him.

"It's such a glorious life," she ran on; "something so simple and grand about it, isn't there?"

"Indeed, yes," and he threw her an admiring glance, "though not many people seem to be capable of seeing it. For my part, I can only say what can a man want better? As long as things are going reasonably well, I

am perfectly happy farming from morning till night. Of course, I go to Salisbury occasionally, but I never really want to go, it is always a tax, and I have no desire to waste hours shooting, or smoking on the verandah. I read the paper a little in the evening, but I am always too tired for anything else, and glad to go to bed very early."

"Delightful!" with emphasis, "and Mrs. Grant"—innocently—"does she love farming from morning till night, too?"

He was casually pruning a fruit tree, as he passed, and he answered, half at random: "My wife! oh, yes, she likes it. She has always lived in the country, you see. I daresay it would be dull for a town girl, but then, why is any man so foolish as to bring a town girl out here? I should never have dreamt of asking a town girl to come to live on a colonial farm. It shows such childish short-sightedness to do a thing like that—don't you think so?"

"Yes, decidedly. It's just the sort of thing Billy would do. I must speak to him on the subject, and instil him with your wisdom. Am I to make Mrs. Grant's acquaintance to-day, I wonder?"

"Indeed, I hope so. She will be delighted to see you." He led her towards a path which made a short cut to the house, but here the doctor intervened:

"Not to-day, if you don't mind, Miss Webberley, Mrs. Grant is unusually tired, so I said I would ask you to come another day instead."

Oswald Grant glanced up impatiently.

"But Miss Webberley has walked a long way, doctor," he said. "I really think my wife would rather she came up to the house now. I thought she seemed better than usual at lunch."

The doctor only looked at Dinah. "I'm very sorry," he said quietly.

"I shall love to come another day," she announced promptly; "it's a glorious country for walking, and I've thoroughly enjoyed rummaging round Captain Burnett's house. In any case, it would have to be a hurried visit, and I should much prefer to sit and chat."

"You are very kind," Oswald said; "we shall be delighted to see you, I'm sure. I'll come a little way up the valley with you," and he walked on ahead of her, launching forth at once into a lengthy and scientific discourse on agriculture that would have bored Dinah to

tears, had she not been so amply blessed with a capacity to extract humour from the most unpromising subjects.

"You will know more than any of us presently," Burnett said to her, when at last the lecturer had retired, and he had been able to take his place.

"What a man!" she exclaimed with a groan. "Is he, by any chance, what is generally known as a saint? because, if so, how *tired* God must sometimes get of His saints."

They wandered along slowly, the other two getting well ahead, chatting idly of Rhodesia. Burnett told her in his quiet way how he loved it, and how its undoubted fascination never in any degree lessened for him.

"What about marrying?" she asked in her outspoken manner. "Are you all going to be bachelors—you, and Billy, and Beauty, and Jim?"

"Why should we? Why shouldn't a woman be happy here, too?"

But at that Dinah suddenly burst out: "Then—town or country—take care she is made for the part," she exclaimed. "It hurts, yes, it positively *hurts*, to think of a cultured, keen-brained woman wearing herself out trying to get nourishment from this," and she waved her hand, and glanced round with a sudden look of aversion. "I've only been out three weeks, but I can see what it is—what it would soon become. Only women with Butterick or Beeton brains could possibly endure it. These kopjes you all rave about, and all this dried grass and stunted trees, and acres of dead mealie stalks, they get on my nerves already. It's like sitting down thinking to enjoy an interesting book, and finding yourself landed with a Bradshaw. As long as it's novel, it's bearable—but afterwards—oh, if I *had* to stay here I should feel as if I had asked Life for bread and she had given me a stone; and I should die of the longing to hurl it at her head."

She tramped on ahead of him, with the graceful, elastic swing that made people constantly remark how extraordinarily well she carried herself, and Burnett found himself admiring it with some vague undercurrent of regret.

"The 'Back o' Beyond' is all very well for disappointed lovers, and moony poets, and men who want to be always killing something, but it's a living death to a young, ambitious brain."

"I protest!" he demurred. "This is not the Back o'

Beyond at all. Give us our due. Wait till you've seen Salisbury *en fête* all in its best clothes! Wait till you've seen our august Legislative Council in the act of assembling! Wait till you've worried through a Government House crush, with a temperature of 85° in the shade!"

"I don't care. It's on the outside rim anyway. The most I will allow you is that it's the Edge o' Beyond, and I still think your women need to be made for the part. There is only one type beside the colonial 'Hausfrau,' and that is the 'Home Chatty' girl. The 'Daily Round and Common Task' girl, the 'Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever' girl. Personally, I think you might as well be a silly ass at once, but it's the only kind possible for such an existence. I loathe the Daily Round and Common Task. I am just tingling with life all through. I want a fresh sensation every day—fresh places—fresh people—fresh conversation. I'd sooner die than become a machine—— Ugh! the mere idea makes me feel corpse-like. I tell you your beautiful Rhodesia would be a mausoleum to me—a mausoleum built of kopjes with a Cross of Five Stars overhead."

An extraordinary vehemence seemed to shake her, and with her light, swinging step she raced ahead of him, talking volubly, almost as if hurrying away from the wraith of some strange presentiment.

"The country hasn't got hold of you yet," he said in his pleasant voice. "You don't know what it is when it once gets hold of you. *It never lets go!*"

"Then it shall never get hold."

But he only smiled again.

"It is no respecter of persons. It draws like a Pied Piper of Hamelin. It will be interesting to watch your prejudices and defences going down before the piping. I can imagine the country making a special effort on your behalf."

She swung round, with her head in the air, and the daredevil, impudent expression that was one of her greatest charms; yet there was still that gleam of defiance; that suggestion of a purposed exaggeration to reassure herself, and convince him.

"Oh, damn the country!" she said, "I'm not afraid of it."

CHAPTER VIII

DINAH'S DOMESTIC EXPERIENCES

A WEEK later, the doctor, entering the Grants' house unannounced, was greeted by totally unusual sounds of merriment, and stopping a moment to investigate, discovered Dinah on the verandah, entertaining Joyce and the professional nurse. He stayed a moment longer, with his gaze fixed half wistfully, half curiously on Joyce. She was laughing as gaily as any, and there was a light in her eyes, and a flush on her cheeks, and a general radiancy about her that surprised him. In his memory he saw again, with a pang, the pain-wrung face and the pleading hands held out to him, of their first meeting, and heard the broken and piteous words of a pain-wrung soul, and a sudden sharp wave of protest possessed him. "Powers above!" he muttered. "This child was made for laughter, and what have you not given her already of tears?"

Then he opened the French window and stepped through, and they all greeted him with unfeigned delight.

"What is all the merriment about?" he said. "Let me join in; it was specially prescribed for me by my physician."

"Miss Webberley is giving us some of her experiences with the black-boys," Joyce said. "She seems to be getting on even worse than I did. Do tell him about the starching!" turning to Dinah.

"Yes," said the doctor; "tell me about the starching, Miss Webberley."

"It was only an account of an experiment," said Dinah, "that didn't come off quite right. You see, I don't know anything about starching, so for the first three weeks nothing got starched at all. It didn't seem to matter, and I shouldn't have bothered, only Mrs. Hatton chanced to call, and she impressed me with the fact that things looked much nicer and kept clean longer starched; and

as I like to be thorough in anything I undertake, I thought I'd better make an effort to improve the condition of the weekly washing. I told her I hadn't any starch, but she said that didn't matter at all; all you had to do was to make some flour paste, and add it to boiling water and then dip the things in it. It sounded delightfully simple, so I proceeded, gazed upon in wondering admiration by our two delectable house-boys. I made the flour paste in a big washing basin, and then I added some boiling water. Then I dipped the things in and rolled them up, ready to iron the next day."

"Well," from the doctor, as she paused.

"They're rolled up still. They won't come unrolled! My wonderful paste starch has stuck them all together in a solid lump, from which no power on earth seems able to extricate them! . . . It's really a horrible predicament," she ran on, while the doctor lay back in his chair and laughed. "The Salisbury shirt was among them, and Billy's language when I handed it to him in a lump was frightful. You see, it happened to be his turn to go to town, so he was collecting the presentable garments, and had got everything together except the shirt. When he asked me for it, I said, 'Oh, it's grand! I starched it for you with a new process, and the process is still proceeding. You'll find it on the spare bed with the other things!' Then I waited behind a gun! A pair of his duck trousers was also there, you see! I only wonder the lurid quality of his adjectives didn't unstick the lot."

"But what in the world did you starch duck trousers for?" asked Joyce, when the laugh subsided.

"How should I know what ought to be starched? The starch had to be used up, after my trouble in making it, so I plunged in whatever came handiest at the end."

"But why roll them up?" asked the nurse.

"Haven't a notion," shaking her head; "but I'm certain I've seen things rolled up in England, waiting to be ironed. And, anyhow, it didn't make much difference. The only thing not rolled up was the tablecloth. The cook-boy put that out to dry on his own responsibility, with the result that now it won't roll up for love or money. We can't even get it in at the door."

Her way of relating her adventures reduced them almost to tears, particularly when she described how Jim had claimed the trousers, and insisted upon wearing them,

because he said they saved him the bother of getting a chair, as he had only to lean on them. "The things are all soaking in the river now," she finished. "They've been there two days, and Beauty calls it the 'Household Dam.'"

"But you like the black house-boys, don't you?" the nurse asked.

"Oh! they're daisies!" emphatically. "The two we've got now have an indecent habit of gambling away their clothes. One day they'll be tricked out regardless, and the next when you're expecting someone to call, a black body with a rag round it, is all you can produce to bring in the tea. This morning when I told them to go and wash their shirts and limbo, they both protested that they couldn't, because they'd nothing else to put on. I had to rummage out extra garments. One finally went off in some old pyjamas hanging together by threads, and the other in a blouse of mine, with a bit of an old tablecloth below. They may be very nice in theory, but they're a bit off in practice. I seem to have a numbing effect on them. I tell the cook-boy to cook something, and how to do it, and he stands like a wooden post, with his mouth wide open, staring at me."

"Yes, I know," from Joyce. "It's awful just at first. I used to be absolutely at my wits' end to know what to do with them. I had one boy who wore a big knife in his belt, and he never seemed to do anything but sit and smoke in front of the kitchen fire; and when I tried to scold him he scowled at me, and I was terrified."

"But didn't your husband speak to him?" asked the doctor.

"Oh, Oswald liked him. He was so artful. He always knew how to keep right with him."

The doctor knit his brow while Joyce ran on: "I had another who used to get drunk on Kaffir beer. He wasn't excited, you know, but he sat on the kitchen table and grinned like a Christy Minstrel, humming snatches of songs. I generally had to do the cooking myself when he was like that."

The doctor's frown deepened.

"Most unwise in this climate," he remarked.

"Piccanins are really the best if you can get hold of a good one and teach him," Joyce finished.

"We've got a piccanin," said Dinah. "He's a cross

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between a little devil and a little monkey. You ought to see him hanging on to the end of my top-boot, trying to get me out of it!" She laughed infectiously at the remembrance and continued: "The first time I kept telling him to pull harder, and there he was fairly dancing about in his frantic efforts, for all the world like a small black devil on a string, until suddenly his hands slipped, and he turned a lovely somersault backwards. I laughed till I ached, and then I sent for the house-boy. He was a bit stronger, and I had to hold on to the sides of the chair; but just when he was getting the knack of it, the piccanin chipped in and gave a sudden unexpected tug, and I was on the floor before you could say Jack Robinson. And there was that little black devil, fairly splitting his sides!"

When they gave her a chance to proceed, she finished:

"Beauty, the Syndicate Artist, has achieved immortality with a sketch of a huge top-boot, with two black figures in the nude clinging to one end of it, and my graceful form in a reclining position at the other. He calls it 'Dinah's Début'!"

"When are they coming to see me?" Joyce asked. "Don't you find it rather a responsibility to manage three young men single-handed?"

"I don't manage them, except over the cakes, which I lock up. In everything else they manage me. I often threaten to report them as slave-dealers. Billy looks upon me absolutely as a sock-darner and button-fixer. He seems to have accumulated worn-out garments for years, ready to keep me occupied! Fancy me darning socks! Never did such a thing in my life; and it's only after the most strenuous and violent efforts I can sew anything on to a button for myself."

The doctor laughed. "I can just imagine," he said, "some poor misguided man, who particularly admires the domesticated woman, falling hopelessly in love with you, to go buttonless for the rest of his life."

"Heaven preserve both of us!" she exclaimed. "And if I am ever deluded into the married state, take the poor man speedily to everlasting glory. He will have earned it in a month."

As she finished speaking, Oswald Grant came up from the lands for tea, and greeted her with undisguised pleasure.

"I was just remarking," she told him, "that marriage

is a snare and a delusion—and if any man ever dares sufficiently to prevail upon me to marry him, he will deserve everlasting glory at the earliest vacancy."

Oswald looked as if he did not know whether to be shocked or not; but, finally, his liking for her prevailed, and he replied with a slightly condescending smile, "I think he will be a most fortunate person."

"Oh, you don't know!" shaking her head. "I shouldn't kill him mercifully; it would be a case of slow torture. I heard yesterday of a farmer in the neighbourhood who is reported to have said he wants two wives, one big and one small. The impudence! I should like to be the big one for half a day!" with a bloodthirsty expression. "Of course," sipping her tea, and addressing herself pointedly to Oswald, "you will agree with me that the present matrimonial system is entirely wrong. No man ought to be sure of his wife for more than six months at the outside."

"There would be a nice state of affairs if he were not," decidedly.

"Exactly!" with cheerful emphasis. "We should all be nice then—husbands particularly—if they weren't so jolly sure of us."

He looked unmistakable disapproval at that, and vouchsafed no reply.

"Oh, I'm afraid I've shocked you," assuming an ingratiating, regretful voice; "I have such an unfortunate way of expressing myself."

"Not at all," he hastened to reply with magnanimity. "But perhaps matrimony is not a happy subject to jest upon. I am an old-fashioned man, I daresay, but I am not ashamed of it. I consider that any attempt to tamper with God's Holy Institution of Matrimony, as it has always existed, is . . . is . . . er . . . criminal."

For one moment Dinah was beguiled into a straight retort.

"If you had lived in the time of slavery," she said, "you would have pronounced exactly the same verdict, in exactly the same tone, and would have called it God's Holy Institution of Slavery."

He was so surprised that he almost dropped his teacup, and flushed a deeper red under his sun-scorched skin.

"I fail to see your point," a trifle haughtily.

Dinah laughed. "There was no point," she answered; "I only was trying to be clever. My continued and

perpetual failures seem quite unable to convince me of the utter futility of it." She flicked crumbs at one of the dogs and turned the conversation to England, and incidentally to mutual acquaintances. Finally, she amused herself by a reference to the kinsman Earl, about whom she had heard from The Irresponsibles. "Let me see," she remarked with seeming artlessness. "Isn't the Earl of Neath some relation of yours?"

Oswald bridled at once and looked eagerly into her face.

"He is," he answered proudly. "My father was the late Earl's grandson, in the direct line."

"Really!" in feigned surprise. "How very interesting!" She leant forward and stroked the little downy head on Joyce's arm beside her. "Young man," she said, "do you know you're related in the direct line to a real Earl? You ought to be very proud of it." A pained look on Joyce's face escaped her. "Why, you might almost be an earl yourself some day if you are good."

"He might indeed!" exclaimed the proud father. "I've thought it many times. I"

"My baby would never wish so many people to die for his gratification," came from Joyce in a low voice, and Dinah felt instantly and bitterly ashamed of herself.

"It's not a case of wishing or otherwise," Oswald announced in that sententious way of his. "If it is the will of Providence, it would not be for us to disapprove. There is a picture of the family seat in the North of Ireland in this week's *Graphic*," he added, rising to get it. "Do let me show it you."

There was a momentary lull while he hunted among some papers, and then he asked Joyce in a vexed voice where she had put it.

"I don't know where it is," Joyce answered quietly, without looking up.

"Extraordinary, what a way you have of tidying out of place the things I want! I hope you haven't burnt it."

The doctor stared hard at the opposite kopjes. Joyce tightened her clasp of her baby, and looked down at it in silence, feeling that a sympathetic word would bring tears to her eyes, and hoping the doctor would remain rigid.

Dinah, with her sharp instinct, got up and followed Oswald into the house, with the intention of sparing Joyce any further chagrin.

"Never mind now," she remarked cheerfully. "Billy told me you had a fine collection of butterflies. Do show them to me?"

But he would not be frustrated. "I shall find it in a minute," he said. "I believe I put it in a drawer myself, to keep it safely. Oh, here it is!" and he drew out the missing paper with a pleased expression, and proceeded to find the illustration of a fine old castle beside a beautiful lake.

"Our family seat," he said grandiloquently; "rather different from this!" glancing with a slight sneer round him.

Dinah was losing patience.

"Beauty's people live in a place like that," was her only comment. "He lived there himself till he was twenty-three. I asked him how he liked the change to mud huts, and he said he'd been every bit as happy in the huts as in the castle. Sensible boy, Beauty!"

"Young!" in a superior tone. "Very young and not very wise. His people made their money out of harness polish, you know; not an old family at all. My aunt, Lady Penton, and my cousin Lord Lindley, are friends of his people at home."

"Not very wise?" repeated Dinah, ignoring the end of the sentence. "Why his wisdom is the most astonishing thing in the world! Behind that seraphic smile and indolent manner he is a philosopher."

Oswald looked his incredulity, while he studied the print of the castle, as if it was a sight his eyes loved; then he laid it affectionately down and reached out his boxes of butterflies.

Dinah was only a little less bored with his butterflies than with his farming; but she studied them nobly to give the doctor a chance to say a cheery word to Joyce.

She saw him get up from his chair and take a turn down the verandah; then come back and sit in the seat she had vacated, leaning forward, with his arms across his knees, and just the particular smile hovering round his strong mouth, that she knew held depths of healing. She saw Joyce raise her head with a sudden, grateful little smile, followed by a low laugh, that dispelled the unutterable wistfulness from her eyes—and then she rose to go.

The doctor mounted her on her newly acquired horse, and walked a little way beside her.

"What a beautiful child!" was Dinah's first remark, when they were out of hearing. "And what an unutterable snob!"

The doctor looked amused. "I shouldn't have thought you would have been specially struck with the baby's beauty," he said.

"The baby!" in accents of scorn. "Good heavens! it's almost indistinguishable at present. I don't know much about the little angels, but that's the quaintest little lump of pulp I've struck yet. I was thinking of the baby's mother."

The doctor was silent, and Dinah ran on, in her reckless fashion:

"Why, she's a dream, a picture. I've never seen lovelier colouring. If I were you, I should be head over ears in love with her. But perhaps you are? Do say. I'll pop that unmitigated snob for you with the greatest of pleasure. I can't shoot for toffee, but I could have a good try and say I was aiming at a baboon."

"Really, Miss Webberley, your bloodthirstiness is staggering. Are any of us safe?"

"The only thing is the good die young," unheeding him; "and he's so oppressive, one feels no doubt about his being good. - Unfortunately he's not young, though; so I suppose even the gods draw a line somewhere. Just imagine that man in Heaven for ever and ever, telling the angels about the family seat, and how to sow seed, and how in the midst of temptations he never drank and never swore. I've had the whole noble history of it. Temptations forsooth!" with curling lips. "Why, I don't suppose he knows what a temptation is! He hasn't got grit enough for it. He's one of those Irish freaks with a pedigree instead of a backbone, and a coat of arms to hide his want of real, honest grit. I know the type. I once visited in a select Irish set, where cousins intermarried continually to keep the blood blue, ignoring the fact that in the process it became merely blue water; and you felt the only thing wanting to complete their happiness was the wearing of phylacteries, embroidered with their pedigrees. But how in the world did he get himself married to that adorable child! She must have been pushed into it, for anyone can see she is not a simpleton. She's got more brains and common sense in her little finger than he has in his whole body."

"I don't know much about it, except that they were very poor, and her mother died and she was left alone in the world."

Dinah bit her teeth together. "That's the sort of thing I always want to kick Fate for. It's so grossly unfair. I wish I'd been there. I'd have shared half my mite with her, rather than let him have her."

The doctor knit his forehead a moment.

"After all, it's something to have a home and be taken care of," he said. "Many people would say this was immeasurably better than being a nursery governess, or hospital nurse, which is about all she could have looked for."

"Fiddlesticks! How long would she have been a nursery governess or a nurse with a face like that, and a brain into the bargain? As I said to Captain Burnett the other day, this sort of thing is all right for a Home-chatty, Sunday-at-home girl, and very fortunately for the race there are a good many about; but Joyce Grant is simply wasting her sweetness on the desert air—as some silly ass put it. Come, own up, doctor, you've known her pretty intimately now for over a month. Isn't she about as much in her element as I should be sitting on the North Pole?"

But the doctor remained grave. "She was out of place until a month ago," he admitted.

"And you think that lump of pulp is going to make all the difference! Well, you probably know more about it than I do, but it seems a miracle. What if he turns out a miniature of his father! She'll want to smother him, I should think, at the earliest opportunity."

"He won't. Boys nearly always take after their mother, and Nature, on the whole, evens up things. He'll be all the world to her!"

Dinah flicked her horse impatiently.

"It's not enough," she said; "the child's got something deeper in her even than that, and commonplace people are so thick on the ground, we can't afford to waste the few of finer tone. I don't want to be rude, but your arguments lack the force of honest belief. In your heart you don't think as you speak."

She touched the horse again. "I must hurry on now, or there'll be nothing at all for dinner, and three ill-used colonists wailing round an empty table. Tell Captain

Burnett you saw me safe and sound at five-thirty heading for home. 'Traveller' was a bit tiresome when we started out, and he seemed convinced I should come to grief as soon as he left me to my own devices. We rode round by Chishawasha, you know!" and with a bright nod she cantered off, leaving the doctor standing in the path. He turned homewards with a set, rather bitter expression.

"My arguments lack the force of belief!" he repeated to himself half fiercely. "How in the world could she see that? But it must *not* be so. The child must be the well-spring of healing. It means life or death to her."

CHAPTER IX

TWO DREAMERS

THAT evening the two Harrovians sat again on the verandah, enjoying the peacefulness of the night. Nearly six weeks had passed since the first evening, when their thoughts had been so blissfully indifferent to everything except restfulness and each other; and now there is an indefinable change.

When Destiny throws her bolts, the waters of life do not close over them and leave no sign; rather there are eddying circles, reaching outward and outward to unseen limits, affecting to some extent all within touch.

But with our two Harrovians the change is somewhat uncertain at present, almost unnoticeable: in the doctor an added healthiness, mysteriously blended with an added weariness; in the imperturbable ex-hussar, an unusual suggestion, in his habitual thoughtfulness, of thoughts deeper and more personal than of old.

A change yet not a change. The same verandah, the same hour, the same calm, to all intents and purposes the same men—yet, withal, a subtle sense of the Bolt of Destiny—of some indistinct happening that has changed irremediably the course of each life, turning them into a path they cannot choose but follow, and which will lead them to greater happenings still; and without doubt, to some higher plane of life and thought, if they but keep their courage undaunted to the end.

For whether we call life's happenings Fate or Provi-

dence, it is not difficult to believe that the ultimate goal intended is a good one, however circuitous and mysterious the route. The downhill path itself, may end in a sublime heroism; Failure prove Success; and Weakness develop Strength. It chiefly remains to keep one's *Courage* dauntless through all vicissitudes, whether groping painfully in the dark, or overcoming obstacles in the sunlight; and if we do not reach the goal our eager dreams have pictured, we can at least, when the time comes, lay down our weapons—*unafraid*.

A change yet not a change! The dim restless murmur as of unseen waves on a sea-shore, vibrating along the lines of life and disturbing indefinitely what before had been absolute peace. The resistless currents of Being, drawing one here and another there into the whirlpool of restless thought and action. For absolute peace is not for mortal man.

Only in the calm heavens above, the mysterious worlds follow their serene courses, immutably sublime.

Destiny hurls her bolts—Life hurries us hither and thither—Success and Misfortune alike spell unrest—to *live*, apart from merely existing we must needs *suffer*;—for to whom much is given—much of life, joy, interest, achievement—of them is much expected, much just payment in pain and tears and weariness. "Why?" we ask, "Why? why?" and only in the hidden story of noble lives is the answer decipherable. Was it not in very truth their *pain* that fitted them to fill that exalted station to which the crowd may safely look up?

But ever the serenity of the calm heavens remains unchanged, based on the unalterable purposes of The Eternal. Above all the fret and worry and strife, the quiet stars still look down, "like eyes glistening with heavenly tears over the little lot of man."

Meanwhile we feel that it is an Epicurean age; an age of unrest; of much running hither and thither, seeking this and that.

The man of to-day, not from indifference or hardness of heart, but because his reason can find so little that seems substantial enough to lean upon, says: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die——": in the modern phrasing, "A short life and a merry one." Yet he says it with little real zest. It is at best a sort of compromise. He does not attempt to blind himself by calling it a short

life and a *happy* one. He knows well enough that Happiness and Merriment are often strangers to each other.

One feels a little sadly, if but a few more, amid the hurrying to and fro of this eager seeking, could read the restful message of the unchanging Stars, the mysterious handwriting upon the Wall of Heaven. "*Thou shalt not*" ran the stern message of old, fitted to stern nature in stern days; but to-day the mandate falls on deaf ears, that, in developing understanding, have lost their fear of the unknown. Yet in a different language, in words suited to the present hour—in the mind and heart of man instead of upon Tables of Stone—the Eternal message is in spirit the same. To-day it says—"right or wrong—modern or obsolete—there is *only* satisfaction in striving towards some goal that reflects, however dimly, some vague, far-off Perfection."

In the vernacular, suited to the exigencies of a hurrying existence, the forbidding, "*Thou shalt not*" may even be said to resolve itself into: "Play the Game all down the line, according to your lights; and whether Happiness comes or not, Satisfaction will at least shine tenderly over the quiet years at the end."

The doctor lay back in his chair and tried to give himself up to the sublime soothing of the star-lit night. He was of that band of modern heroes who give freely, unwearyingly, neither asking nor seeking reward—asking, indeed, almost nothing except a little warmth of companionship, and the favour of being let alone by the good, believing people, apt to be over zealous in their desire to convert. Yet to-night he thought, if the power were in him, he would pray for that mother and child, in the little house across the kopjes.

The trend of Ted Burnett's thoughts was shown by a remark, after a considerable silence, to which no immediately previous conversation seemed to lead up.

"By Jove!" he said. "How ripping Miss Webberley looks on horseback!" The doctor half turned to him with a slow smile.

"I thought you were asleep, but apparently you were only dreaming wakeful dreams."

Burnett knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the heel of his boot.

"Not dreaming, only cogitating. It's an extraordinary thing, you know"—in no wise abashed—"how attractive

a plain woman can be. Have you ever realized how very unlikely it would be for Miss Webberley ever to be overlooked?"

"Do you mean because of her height, or her original remarks, or what?"

"Everything. Her height, her figure, the way she carries herself, the way she walks. I never saw a woman walk better in my life. It's a pleasure to see her move. To me it's more pleasing than a pretty face and an awkward gait."

"You seem to have studied her pretty carefully," the doctor was still smiling a little in the darkness—"I'm afraid I haven't; but if you want my opinion of Miss Webberley fair and square, I consider her one of the most delightful people I've ever met. She's simply immense. You've only to look at her to know that she couldn't be mean or petty, and that she'd go through fire and water for a pal."

There was a short silence, then Burnett remarked: "They adore her up at The Knoll, all three of them. I like to hear Billy chaff her. It's somehow more expressive than any term of endearment in the English language. He makes you *feel* that she's half the world to him; and I suppose his gun is the other half."

"It's a lucky thing, then, that she's his sister."

"Why?"

"Because, if she weren't he might want to marry her, and that would surely spell disaster."

Burnett remained silent; and after a moment the doctor added: "She's made it so apparent that under no circumstances could she endure life out here, which, I take it, is Billy's all in all."

Another silence; then tentatively: "I doubt if she means all she says. She seems happy enough at present."

"She means every word of it," asserted the doctor; "and if I may imply it, without casting a slur upon her, she has made a point of making the fact apparent for the sake of any of you men who might be tempted to fall in love with her."

Ted Burnett thought of her advice to him on the subject of a wife, and made no reply; but presently he remarked, a little irrelevantly: "I suppose it's personality that really counts. I've known a good many women, with considerable claims to beauty, who were far less attractive

than Miss Webberley, who is undeniably plain." He got up, and stretched his long arms with a comfortable yawn. "By the way," he added, "there's a reception to-morrow afternoon at Government House. Do you care to go? I thought I'd put in an appearance."

"A bread-and-butter tea fight!" in disgust; "why, I've heard you say you'd sooner go twelve miles to avoid one."

"So I would, as a general rule, but it's rather obligatory to go occasionally."

"Are the others going?" half-slyly.

"Billy is taking Miss Webberley in, and Jim thought he might show up if there were enough decent clothes to go round. Beauty said he objected to Salisbury tea fights on principle, as there was too much removing of neighbours' landmarks, or good name, which he maintained was the same thing. He thought Miss Webberley ought to be taken, though, as part of her Rhodesian education."

"It will probably interest her more than me," was the doctor's verdict. "I think I'll wander over to The Knoll, and have a yarn with Beauty. The mere thought of scandal seems sacrilegious, on a night like this. I don't wonder you've grown so contemplative, old chap. I feel as if I could sit and think like an Egyptian Sphinx for ages, with those stars overhead, and this silence all round."

"Miss Webberley says she can hear it," Burnett commented; "she said, 'Your Rhodesian veldt silence is a thing to listen to. I feel as if I should hear it in my mind, in the heart of London, when I get back.' Rather neat, I thought it."

"She's quite right, though it's a curious misuse of words. I should sooner say it breathes a personality, which haunts one like a sound. But I've found that in many things out here, and it is no doubt the key to the mysterious fascination of the country. There is this arresting sense of a personality everywhere. It is in the kopjes, and in the sky. It is in the wide-spreading veldt, and in the wooded vleis. It is in the hard, red earth, and the blowing sand, and the pitiless glare of the sun. It is at its very highest and best in these warm, luscious, silent, star-lit nights. I don't say it is entirely a fascinating personality. For my part, I should be inclined to distrust it, but I can quite see how it might become a dominant force in others. I can quite realize, for instance, what it is to The Irresponsibles,

and to our noble-minded friend next door, and to you ; but beyond being grateful for its refreshing balm to my wearied senses, during my visit here, I feel no growth of hungry love springing up whatever. The whole personality of Africa, to my thinking, is marred by a certain flaunting, lurid quality. The calm serenity of India, with its unquenchable Oriental patience, and its antiquities of the ages, hold a far deeper appeal to me."

"That's temperament. After all we don't sit and look at tombs here, and wait for things to happen. We make the things happen. That's why it's a good place to be in. There's an element of uncertainty that keeps you wide awake ; and that comforts you, when you're down on your luck with the reflection that anyhow something may turn up to-morrow or next week. Every man who has passed by here during this month has had something to relate, hasn't he ? something a little out of the ordinary ; the whole atmosphere is made up of possibilities pleasant and otherwise, which may, or may not, take place, but which mean life and movement ; and, compared to which, the rural parts of England are mere graveyards. I love the old Country as much as the best of them, but I don't believe I could live there again for anyone, except in a peaceful old age."

"All of which only convinces me that you show a great lack of wisdom in attending this reception to-morrow, instead of packing up your bag, and fleeing to the interior until the danger is past," was the doctor's enigmatical comment.

Ted Burnett smiled, as he stepped aside to mix a whisky and soda. "Which, further, only proves my theory," he replied, "that the fascination of Rhodesia lies largely in the possibilities, pleasant and otherwise, which may or may not take place. Make your mind easy, old chap. As you observed just now, Miss Webberley has been pretty outspoken in her views on colonial life, possibly with some intent, and for the rest I do not think I am built of the stuff of those proverbial fools who rush in ! I shall certainly go to-morrow, if it is only to be entertained with her views on our illustrious capital *en fête*."

CHAPTER X

FROCKS AND FANCIES

DINAH and Billy drove to town in a particularly antiquated Cape cart, which they borrowed from a neighbouring farmer, and which, as Dinah remarked, looked any moment as if it might amuse itself by emulating the famous collapse of the parson's celebrated "One Hoss Shay." Tied on behind was a bundle of forage, and an ungainly sack of mealies for the mules.

"Out here one lives in a perpetual atmosphere of incongruities," she said to Beauty, as Billy and Jim dodged the heels of a kicking mule, while they were trying to fix on harness that apparently consisted of odd bits of leather tied together with string. "In this extraordinary conveyance, that a London coster would regard askance, I take a fifteen-guinea muslin frock, in which to grace the gardens of Government House."

"And I," smilingly, "with a mansion to my name, remain behind because it is Billy's turn to have the Salisbury shirt."

"Not a bit of it, Beauty!" turning to the cart. "You remain behind because even I, resplendent in a Parisian fifteen-guinea frock, cannot lure you from your fastness. My vanity is in shreds. I never expect much of my face, but I did think that frock"

"I never enter a competition where my discomfiture is a foregone conclusion," he told her; "with Jim and Burnett already humbly worshipping, I prefer to nurse my heart as whole as may be."

"Come on! Get up, Di," broke in Billy. "You can listen to Beauty's vapourings when we get back—that is, of course, if we return whole."

"I have been dying to get up for ten whole minutes. Has the—er—chariot got a step, or do you have to vault the wheel?"

They started off with a violent swerve on to a granite

boulder, and with one wheel nearly three feet above the other one, the box containing the precious dress slid out and managed to get itself run over. Wild wailings broke from Dinah as Beauty sprang forward to the rescue, but Billy laughed outrageously, and remarked: "What a blessing it wasn't the sack of mealies!"

Finally they got under way, with Jim following on a bicycle, and in due course arrived at Government House in a rickshaw, and sailed resplendently up to their hostess. Jim was detained in the town on business, so Dinah found herself entirely at Billy's mercy, with the result that he was presently strolling off with a very pretty woman whom he had introduced to her as Mrs. Adair, after planting her down somewhat summarily beside a masculine type of lady, whom he addressed as Mrs. Malcolm, and alluded to behind her back as "Eliza Jane."

Dinah inwardly vowed vengeance at a later date, and lent a curious ear to what the masculine lady might have to tell her. She was relieved to find her distinctly amusing, but was a little startled when she exclaimed suddenly: "Who the devil is that?"

Following her companion's gaze, she beheld Burnett in faultless attire, looking indeed a veritable Sir Galahad, and the cynosure of many curious eyes, dismount, give his reins to a black-boy, and approaching his hostess, bow with cavalier grace over her hand.

"That," said Dinah, "is Captain Burnett. I'm surprised you don't know him. He has lived here some time."

"Not got up like that, though; and, besides, we don't all know each other up here. I should have taken him for a perfect stranger, and prayed he had come to stay. A few more of that stamp would vastly improve the Salisbury breed."

They were sitting in the shade, and the masculine lady was tilting her chair back at such an angle that Dinah momentarily expected her to go over backwards. She rather hoped she would, provided, of course, she did not hurt herself, and Ted Burnett came to the rescue of both of them. Not but that her companion had plenty to say, but it was intensely hot, and there was a glare that hurt her eyes, and she was getting tired of watching their stately hostess receive the flow of callers. She felt, moreover, a growing desire to cross the strip of ground and ally herself

to her host, the Administrator, who looked so unutterably bored that her soul fairly ached to rally him. A rollicking, rampant little dust-devil roused her suddenly, and it was with a face of some disgust she brushed the red dust from her dress. Her companion looked amused.

"Damnable weather— isn't it?" she remarked calmly. "I hate this dry season. One cats and sleeps and breathes sand. I have to smoke nearly all day as a sedative. I feel I'd give a pony for a cigarette now. Suppose I can hardly smoke at a Government House reception, though. Do you smoke?"

"Yes, lots."

"How you would shock your neighbour, Miss Lofty-Soul!"

"Who in the world is that?"

"That's what some of us call Mr. Grant. He once, rather rashly, remarked that a certain person in Salisbury had a lofty soul. Painful creature, isn't he? A pity that little silent wife of his doesn't wake up and sit on him a bit. He wants a right-hander from the shoulder every now and then."

"I could hardly imagine Mrs. Grant administering it," with a laugh.

"Nor I." She broke off suddenly. "What a rum little cough-drop!" and her eye followed the approach of a pretty, well-dressed woman who came up to Lady Bentley, followed by a piccanin carrying a small monkey she had brought as a gift. "What the dickens does Lady Bentley want with an infantine ape!"

"Who is she?" asked Dinah, favourably comparing the newcomer with some of the surrounding dowdiness.

"That!" said her companion with a little sniff, "is Mrs. Langley. As fast as they're made. I'm sorry for the poor devil who is her husband, that's all."

Dinah smiled to herself.

"She looks very nice, anyway," was her rejoinder; "and what a charming frock!"

The masculine lady sniffed again. She herself was dressed in a short tweed skirt, a shirt, and a linen collar, and her attitude expressed a lofty disregard of any such weak foibles as dress and appearance. But quite suddenly her face was transformed with a radiant smile of mingled pride and ownership. Dinah followed the direction of her gaze, and saw a tall, very boyish-looking man approaching.

"That," said the masculine lady proudly, "is my husband," and she hastened forward to meet him.

The next moment Ted Burnett managed to slip into the vacant chair.

"Hullo!" said Dinah, "where in the world have you been hiding yourself all these months? There was quite a flutter among the petticoats when you arrived, looking a sort of Sir Galahad, and everybody asking who you were."

He smiled humorously. "Don't tell," he said; "but this is the first Government House Reception I've ever been to. They're the sort of things I generally go miles to avoid."

"And what's the attraction to-day, pray? Is it pretty Mrs. Langley, who's 'as fast as they're made,' and has a 'poor devil' of a husband?"

"Who said that? She's a ripper. I've always liked Mrs. Langley."

"So I imagined. She is almost sure to be pretty popular with your sex, to get spoken of so by mine. Have you seen anything of Billy? He's behaved disgracefully—bringing me here early and then deserting me."

"I saw him a minute ago. He was talking to our Resident Commissioner's wife, Mrs. Adair, and he invited me to join them. He said they were discussing *Vulgarity versus Immorality*, and had come to a deadlock."

Dinah laughed gaily.

"How like Billy! He's absolutely incorrigible; but nobody ever minds anything he says. He introduced me to Mrs. Adair and I thought her charming."

"So do I. She's a sportswoman. If you talked to her for a week, she would never say an unkind word about anyone."

"I'm sure of it. And she has a sense of humour too; such a godsend in women. She and Billy seemed to be great pals."

"They are. She'll be coming out to see you soon."

"Does anyone ever go and see that angelic child who has the misfortune to be married to the Earl's great-grandson? I declare she is getting on my nerves. Who has she seen before Dr. Lawson and I arrived on the scene?"

Burnett looked grave, and there was a shadow in his kind eyes. "She's perfectly charming, isn't she?" he said. "I admire her pluck so. She must have a devil

of a time, and she never says anything. He brings her to town occasionally, but only to see Lady Marsland, as a rule; and from what Mrs. Grant leaves unsaid, I fancy she prefers remaining at home."

"Who is Lady Marsland?"

"Lady Marsland is the wife of Sir Humphrey Marsland, and she belongs rather to the type of charming women who distribute advice gratis, and are generally trying to run everyone's show as well as their own. Not a restful type, you understand, nor one likely to appeal greatly to anyone as young and fresh as Joyce Grant. Oswald Grant bows down to her—or possibly her title—and discourses at great length upon her womanly attributes which find favour in his eyes. I believe when they are there, poor Mrs. Grant sits silent, in a way that aggravates him considerably. She confided to me once that Lady Marsland was the kind of person that made her feel like a book that had shut up with a snap, and wouldn't open again. She is a closed book generally, but one feels beyond doubt there is more in the book than anyone knows."

"A great deal more," rather bitterly; "she's always thinking. And all the time one feels the child was meant to be joyous. I can just imagine her sitting silent and grave before this Lady Marsland person; and yet she would see the humour in her quicker than anyone with a sympathetic companion."

"Perhaps there would be none to see," suggestively. "Is there always humour in your creed?"

"Decidedly. Wasn't it Ruskin who said there was something at the bottom of everything we should not feel inclined to laugh at if we could see it? Such Tommy Rot! The egotistical old woman! The saving grace of life is that there is something at the bottom of everything to *laugh* at, for those who can see it. Laugh in the morning because it's good for you, and laugh at night because you can't help it—is just about as good a prescription as any doctor can give."

"You've no doubt been having a few quiet smiles here. Mrs. Malcolm was a good start for you. She's Billy's pet aversion. He always calls her Eliza Jane. Did he introduce you?"

"He did, the villain, and then went off and left me. Now, if he'd furraged out the Field-Marshal and introduced me to him, there would have been some sense in it."

"Who do you call the Field-Marshal?"

"A most gallant-looking soldier man, who came up in the train with us. Ever since I saw the twinkle in his eye, when he came back to the carriage after a short absence, and found Dr. Lawson and me conversing like bosom pals, I've wanted to know him. Certainly, they're amusing"—running her eye round. "Quite a Freaks' day out, I should think, isn't it? By the way, who is Mrs. Kitchener?"

"Her husband is farming somewhere outside. He's a good sort, and so is she—a splendid horsewoman."

"They don't seem to like her," nodding at the crowd. "I overheard two snuff-coloured ladies discussing her, and one said she was always cadging a lunch, and the other that when she was invited to stay anywhere, she never knew when to go away. Cadging a lunch, indeed! Did you ever hear anything so cattish! I felt inclined to turn round and miaow and spit. Those are the sort of people who make me tired; they're so hopelessly, appallingly provincial! And there's another lady here—I didn't catch her name, but she's one of the best dressed—who is stated to have said that she only likes men, and hasn't time for women. Well, she's honest, anyhow, and I don't think she'd be cattish. It really isn't surprising, is it, that we get fed up with each other, when we have such feline propensities? Look! There's Billy taking Mrs. Adair to have some tea. How graceful she is? I wonder how they have got on with their debate—Immorality *versus* Vulgarity! What a subject! Really, I sometimes think Billy is quite mad. Of course, he'd innocently assert *nothing* is so unforgivable as vulgarity, and immorality merely a matter of temperament. Have you ever noticed how he delights in saying the most outrageous things with the expression of an archangel?"

"Is he ever serious?"

"Serious!" she echoed. "Why, my dear man, you'd never believe what that boy has read. His taste in books would dumbfound you. He tackles all the 'osophies' and 'ologies,' and when he's alone thinks out abstruse theories for the joy of it. It baffles me. I can do a bit of thinking myself sometimes, but I can't come anywhere near Billy. Haven't you noticed how he and the doctor are palling up? You may depend upon it, when we are safely out of hearing, they discuss Original Sin, and the

Theory of Evolution, and the latest thing in Solar Systems. Jim takes him off splendidly sometimes. Him and Beauty, too—Jim's quite an actor, you know—and they're all dears. I wonder where Jim is, by the way? And if he came after all?"

"Come and have some tea, and we may see him."

They rose and strolled across to the tea tent, and again many eyes followed wonderingly, for, as Burnett had remarked to the doctor, Dinah was not a person to be overlooked in any assembly; and to-day, moreover, there was the fifteen-guinea Parisian gown to excite the envy and admiration of the Wilderness Dwellers. As they neared the tent, Dinah exclaimed in a pleased voice, "Why, there's Jim actually talking to my Field-Marshal!"

Burnett glanced quickly in the direction indicated.

"That is Major Egerton," he said; "he's a V.C. man. Some connection of Jim's, I believe."

At that moment Jim espied them, and with a hurried word to his companion hastened to meet them.

"Come and have tea with us," he exclaimed. "I've been wondering where you were," addressing Dinah; "I want to introduce you to my cousin, Major Egerton."

The Major had already recognized Dinah, and while he made her a courtly bow that won her heart instantly, a certain twinkle deepened in his eyes as he remarked, "I think I have had the pleasure of seeing you before? I have been wondering what has become of my fellow traveller, the doctor."

"You needn't imply that I've spirited him away," with an answering twinkle. "As a matter of fact, he's more flesh and less spirit than before. He's been making hay while the sun shines—that is to say, drinking in kopje air and veldt elixir, and getting fat and strong. You would hardly know him."

"He is not here to-day, then? How is that?"

"Oh, he hasn't gained much in frivolity. Tea-fights are hardly in his line. You must come and see him at The Knoll some time. He is constantly over."

The Major said he should be delighted, and rapidly formed the opinion that the grave doctor had shown no small perspicacity in reserving himself all through the outward journey for this original and entertaining companion. Indeed, such an amount of laughter presently issued from that particular corner of the tent, that many

envious glances were thrown in their direction. It drew slightly disturbed ones from Ted Burnett, seeing the Major was more than good to look at, and did not live among the kopjes and rank grass, and was a particularly eligible bachelor.

"Well, and how do you like Rhodesia?" he was asking Dinah, after she had told him something of her travels.

"It's delightful!" promptly; "but I should say it wanted to be taken in small doses. I am going to continue to be gloriously happy out here for two months more; then I shall spread out my wings and fly before the reaction sets in."

"You will come back," he told her. "Everyone comes back sooner or later."

"Like bad pennies," laughing; "but from all accounts, most of the gold goes away, and stays away. What do you do? Come and go, drawn by invisible sirens singing among the kopjes?"

"Well, I come and go certainly, but I can't say I've heard the ladies in question raising their voices. I should uncommonly like to. It would make an agreeable change. We're very dull just now."

"You look particularly festive," glancing round.

"We get duller and duller," he declared humorously, "and yet they say drunkenness is on the decrease. It speaks well for the moral strength of the population, doesn't it? for I always thought people took to drink when they felt dull."

"That is when I take to dress," Dinah told him. "When I've got the blue-devils badly, I put on my newest and smartest frock, and after admiring the effect profoundly in the glass, I go off in search of someone looking particularly dowdy. Without needing to make unkind comparisons, the consciousness of being better dressed than one's companion is sufficiently soothing."

"Which bears out a theory of mine, that whereas we are, as a people, declared to be merely miserable sinners, we are in reality intensely stupid, intensely respectable, and inordinately vain."

"You flatter me!" Dinah exclaimed; "but I think, if you don't mind, I'll stay among the miserable sinners."

"I'm delighted to hear it; and please don't hurry away from Rhodesia again before you can help it. I have come to the conclusion that what we want up here

is a leaven of unrighteousness, and a pretty big one, too. The bread is too heavy and solid altogether, and we are all getting old and dyspeptic."

"And gouty in the feet," suggested Jim mischievously.

"Yes, and gouty in the feet!" echoed the Major, thoroughly relishing the joke, "I wish you'd had my feet a week ago."

"It doesn't matter in the least so long as one's heart is young," quoth Dinah sagely. "I mean to keep a young heart till I die."

The twinkle in the Major's eye danced irresistibly.

"I beg to differ," he said; "for my part, having just recovered from an attack of gout, I'd sooner keep young in the feet," and his laugh was most infectious.

"And I," put in Jim, "having just recovered from too much lobster salad, would sooner keep young in—er—well, 'Little Mary.'"

"What's that about 'Little Mary'?" asked Billy, as he and Mrs. Adair strolled up to the group. "You seem pretty merry. How do, Major—I must congratulate you on your swift and sudden promotion. My sister always speaks of you as the Field-Marshal."

"Billy, I'll kill you!" blushing in spite of herself, while the Major seemed to enjoy the notion tremendously.

"Don't do anything rash," he laughed, "because I'm entirely of the opinion that I ought to be one, if only the War Office were not so deplorably stupid."

"I give your brother up, Miss Webberley," said Mrs. Adair in her low, musical voice. "He is quite beyond me, and if I can't repress him, I really don't think anyone else can."

"No one who knows him well ever tries," Dinah told her; "because nothing has a more invigorating and inspiring effect upon him. The only safe plan is to agree inately with all he says until he is wearied out; then sometimes in a fit of *ennui* he will say something he means, and converse quite sensibly."

Billy looked severe. "I hope you don't intend to imply, Dinah, that I should be so wanting in courtesy to Mrs. Adair as to say things to her that I did not mean, or to talk foolishly. We have been having a most interesting discussion on Immorality *versus* Vulgarity—but we got a little mixed up with cleanliness being next to godliness," he finished wickedly.

Mrs. Adair shook her finger at him. "Now stop," she said; "it's really too hot for any more. I shall put myself under the Field-Marshal's protection if you say another argumentative sentence."

"Miss Webberley has been criticizing this dear country of heat and flies," said the Major. "She says it wants to be taken in small doses only, and further insinuates the presence of musical sirens to account for the continual return of those who go away."

"I agree with her about the moderate doses," Mrs. Adair replied, adding with a flash of humour, "I consider myself a most virtuous person, but even my wifely duteousness will never again, I think, stretch to a longer period than one year at a time."

Lady Bentley, escorted by the Chief Secretary, then joined them, and after a little more lively banter, Dinah retired with her bodyguard of three, to start on the homeward journey.

"Billy," she said, as the ungainly Cape cart again got under way, followed by Burnett and Jim on their respective horse and bicycle, "I've fallen in love with the Field-Marshal. You just ask him out next Sunday, or I'll never speak to you again."

CHAPTER XI

OF LOVE'S HEALING

MEANWHILE the doctor certainly sallied forth with the intention of having that yarn with Beauty, but as he had to pass beside the Grants' house, it was not very surprising that he called to see if all were well *en route*.

He found Joyce alone on the verandah, toying with some sewing, the nurse having now departed, and the son and heir being occupied with his afternoon nap.

"I was just going up to see Beauty," he said, looking a little longingly at the chair beside her. "I am alone, and he is alone—and it seems you are alone also."

She smiled up at him. "Perhaps Beauty has gone out shooting, or riding, or he may have found another companion. Hadn't you better decide 'a lonely bird in the hand . . .'"

He needed no second invitation, and sat down gladly enough, with a little sigh of content.

"Your husband busy as usual?" glancing down over the lands.

"Yes; Oswald is always hard at work. I daresay it is very creditable of him, but I think a little more play would be very beneficial."

"Undoubtedly, but at the same time one feels work is, in a way, play to him. One feels he is happier at work than he would be just amusing himself."

She hid her face over her sewing and made no reply. The idea crossed her mind that he might have given an hour occasionally to amusing his wife if not himself, but she was too proud to let the doctor even guess she could harbour such a thought. Nevertheless, he knew exactly what was in her mind, and because, seeing her fairness and youthfulness and liveness, his whole soul rebelled, he could not trust himself to speak.

Joyce herself relieved the silence by remarking with a little smile: "But, after all, when one is poor, a too busy husband is far better than a too idle one, isn't it?"

"Certainly," with an answering smile. "I notice you have a most praiseworthy aptitude for finding the bright side in most things."

"Habit"—lightly—"purely habit. Mother and I often used to amuse ourselves hunting up silver linings."

"Was there often cause?" very kindly.

"Yes, and no. Of course, as long as we had each other nothing mattered dreadfully, but it is very difficult to be very poor and rather proud as well. When one is actually needing money, the silver linings are apt to get almost lost sight of, especially when it is a case of ill health, and necessities that are not procurable."

"Was your mother delicate?" He glanced covertly at the delicate, sensitive face with its unmistakable suggestion of frailty.

"Not exactly, but I think my father was. As a family we always had rather too much spirit for our strength. Of course, they had to pay for it."

He leaned forward and tried to assume a lightness that would hide a genuine anxiety.

"Well, you must gather wisdom from the recollection, then," he told her. "In this country it is fatal to get

continually over-tired. Don't ever do anything at all when you are tired. Just laze."

"And what about the Mighty Atom?" glancing along the verandah to the room where the baby was sleeping.

"You are having a white nurse, I hope?" with seriousness. "I was going to ask you about it."

She remained silent a moment; then remarked lightly: "But the piccanins are so good with children, and a white nurse might be such a thorn."

He knew she was begging the question, and refused to give way.

"It is very necessary," gravely. "I spoke to Mr. Grant about it. Did he tell you?"

"Yes; and I'm afraid we dared to differ. Don't be vexed. I really should be awfully worried with a white servant out here. I should think she was dull and miserable, and it would get on my nerves."

She was loyal still, and he knew it. Not for worlds would she have told him how her husband had pooh-poohed the idea as an absurd extravagance; quoting the case of his mother looking after her own babies, and holding forth on the duties of motherhood.

"It is disgraceful," he had said, "how the women of the present day hand over their children to hired servants, rather than lose a few hours' pleasure themselves. Surely, a few years is not too much for a mother to sacrifice to her child."

"It is not a question of what you would both like," the doctor insisted unbendingly, "it is a physical necessity. If you attempt to do everything yourself, with only these stupid black-boys to help you, you will end by breaking down altogether."

She turned her eyes away from him, and tried to answer brightly: "What a dragon you are, but I'll speak to Oswald again, of course, if you really think it necessary."

"I do, most emphatically, and I think the sooner the better."

She changed the subject, chatting of Dinah and her brother; and of Captain Burnett and Jim as possible suitors to the former.

"How nice it would be to have her here," she finished, "but I'm afraid it's not in the least likely."

"Not in the least," he agreed. "I've been giving Burnett veiled warnings, which I don't think he has any

intention of benefiting by. Miss Webberley would be entirely out of place here, and she knows it."

"But he might go elsewhere?"

"Burnett *loves* Rhodesia"—with emphasis. "He would never be quite as happy elsewhere. I think it would be a misfortune for them to get to care for each other. I'm advising Ted to take refuge at once in flight."

She glanced up at him. "What about you, yourself? Are you invulnerable? The first day she came I thought it was more likely to be you."

He smiled a little sadly. "I admire her immensely," he answered, "but matrimony is not allowed for in my future programme. I am not of the elect."

"Oh, but why?"—earnestly—"surely anyone as clever as you, and with so much brain work, needs sympathy and love more than any."

He gave her a fleeting, half-surprised glance. How had she come by that knowledge in her short span of life—the insistent need of the exceptional and brainy for sympathy and soothing?

"Yes, but I'm afraid I should be a little difficult to please," he told her. "And then I should be very trying, too, I expect. I should be a nervy, unsatisfactory, worrying sort of husband. Too often headachy, and irritable, and over-tired, to make it worth anyone's while to put up with me."

But she only looked at him with motherliness in her eyes.

"That is just why you need someone. What strange creatures men are. Some of you will not marry because you won't ask a woman to be poor, and some because you think you would be moody and not gay enough, and some because you are not strong. And all the time the world is full of women who only want to have someone absolutely their own to love and take care of."

"How do you know all this?" he leaned towards her suddenly. "Where did you have time to find your wisdom?"

His eyes startled her a shade, but she met them unflinchingly: "Why here, of course"—tapping her forehead. "Here, and in books. I read a good deal."

"And you think some women could love a man enough to forgive him being irritable and bearish, and understand just how it was, and be happy taking care of him."

"I *know* they could. Only you must be very circumspect. I don't say every charming woman is like that."

"You needn't be anxious," with a touch of weariness. "It sounds very restful and nice, of course, but it is not for me. Even if some kind woman were willing to make a martyr of herself, I wouldn't let her. I know myself too well. I'm all sorts of dreadful things, you know: an agnostic, a heathen, a free thinker. I haven't any principles, nor any recognized line between right and wrong. I don't even know what is right, and what wrong."

She leaned back watching him, but there was no shadow of distrust in her eyes.

"I wonder why you are so good to everyone," she said. "Captain Burnett has talked to me about you several times. I know a lot about the good deeds you so carefully hide."

She continued to watch him quietly, trying not to let herself be beguiled into a comparison. But at the back of her brain she knew that, according to the canons of conventional society, her husband, Oswald Grant, was a saint, and this man a sinner: the one high-principled, highly moral, an orthodox Christian in every sense; the other, by his own admission, an unprincipled unbeliever. She refused to let her brain wander further. Life was so difficult, so complicated. If she thought all day long how could she ever reconcile the fact that, in a time of need if she had to choose, she would instantly trust her welfare to the man who affirmed he had neither principles nor belief?

Suddenly he turned to her, with an expression difficult to understand.

"Well," he said, "aren't you horrified? Don't I inspire you with pitying contempt?"

She returned his glance half-wonderingly. "No," breathing a little fitfully, "oh, no."

"I wonder why"—half to himself. "You seem to have lived always in an atmosphere of faith and goodness. I was prepared to see you shocked and horrified, supposing I told you, and yet——"

"Well?" as he hesitated.

"I hardly know—but I half felt I was wronging you by thinking so. From what I know of you, I feel you understand how some of the sinners have at least got their scars and stains in the thick of the fight, while some of the stainless saints remained outside the danger zone altogether."

"I'm only desperately sorry," she said simply. "It must be so difficult sometimes to go on."

"It is," with quiet emphasis, "but I did not expect you to understand that." He looked down at the ground lost in thought. Why *did* she understand it? Was it possible that in her young life she had touched a level where it was difficult to go on? Had she ever come within sight of such a level? Rebellion at the mere thought stirred his pulses, and he could not trust himself to speak.

Joyce watched him, noting the lines of thought and care on the fine face; the tender, sensitive mouth; the strong chin that betokened the indomitable will.

"Is religion all a myth to you?" she asked at last; "a sort of fabrication built up by the ages, to supply the human's need for emotional worship? a fabrication born of restless brains in search of satisfaction?"

"No," half-sharply. "No, no"—then he got up and walked down the verandah, and back again. After a little he came and stood beside her chair, slightly in the background.

"I can't tell you what it is to me," he said, "but your arguments, I should be inclined to believe, prove there is something in it. The restless craving in the human heart for some sort of satisfaction did not, I think, grow there haphazard. Because it is there, and outlives everything else, I think it possible there is, here or elsewhere, some fulfilment, some inheritance. But I cannot go any further. Concerning the essence of this fulfilment, or the conditions under which it may be gained, I have no theory whatever. At best one can only grope, and often it is not even towards a light."

"But it hurts?" she questioned, in a low voice, "this groping in emptiness."

"Oh, it all hurts more or less," half-lightly, anxious not to depress her; "but one gets used to that."

She made no comment, but the little sad smile hovering round her lips pained him more than words. He took a turn down the verandah again and came back to his old position.

"I want to say," he began a little hesitatingly, "that what I believe or disbelieve has nothing to do with anyone else. I am just as likely to be in the wrong as others, and the reason I scarcely ever allude to these questions is my insistent belief that we cannot judge for each other. Every

man must make up his mind for himself, according to his own experience. One thing is very certain, we almost all need comfort if we can find it. If, in difficulty, you found comfort in the thought of a Heavenly Father, I should be the last to scoff, and I should be glad that it were so. If the comfort were actually there, I should feel it was for you a valuable reality, and this, of itself, would be as powerful argument for its truth as all I might advance to the contrary. In my case it is necessary to remember that owing to ill health myself, and constant contact with physical suffering, I have often been so tortured I can see only one side of the pitiless inequality, the blackest and most cruel my human understanding can conceive. This has largely moulded my thoughts and my conviction ; but it is a view many have never had nor will have." He paused, and she waited, hoping he would go on. After a short space he concluded : " It is as absurd to suppose that the truth, and the whole truth, is revealed to me alone, as for Christians to claim it for themselves alone. We can only let it remain there—that what is, is ; and that there must of necessity be some truth in all things and all thought, though not of equal value."

Another silence followed ; then Joyce remarked very simply : " I don't know much about it, but I think that must be the point where Love steps in, or should step in, to heal the tired, confused brain with a soothing that is a simple, undeniable fact, and leaves no room for reasoning or proving. One might go to sleep under the touch of a Love like that, and wake up reconciled."

From his half-hidden vantage-ground he looked down at the small head with a passion of pain and longing in his eyes. Over each ripple of sunlit hair his gaze travelled in a caress ; over the smooth, delicate contour of her face, down to the little sensitive, white, blue-veined hands lying in her lap. Always when he looked at her hands he remembered Browning's lines :

" Your soft hand is a woman in itself,
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside."

He thought now if he might kiss each pink-tipped finger and then press them hard against his aching, weary forehead, to hold them there as his right ; he might even fall asleep, to wake up reconciled. The dream was divinely

sweet, in the maze of its alluring meshes he heard no sound until a shuffling step approaching, caused Joyce to say quietly: "That is Oswald coming up for tea. I must go and see about it. The boys never seem to do anything properly, now I have had to leave them alone so much." And she vanished into the house, leaving him alone on the verandah.

When Oswald Grant joined him there was a momentary shadow of irritation at finding no tea prepared, but he had the grace to merely mutter something about the stupidity of the boys, and sit down to wait. The doctor hesitated a moment, then went to see if he could be of any assistance to Joyce.

"My dear child, you spoil them 'utterly," was her husband's reply, when she explained that the boys had forgotten to make any preparations. "They get worse and worse. Nothing is ever up to time nowadays. I'm sure I don't know what they do, for the house is dirty enough, and this week's washing is disgraceful."

The doctor was almost afraid to look at Joyce for fear of the pain he might see in her face, but when she replied callously—"Yes, dreadful, isn't it! I only told Tomo this morning your room was like a pigsty and he must do most of the washing over again. He has sulked ever since"—he looked up in surprise. Her lips were a little rigid and she spoke with her eyes on the teacups; and it was in the doctor's face the pain dawned. He suddenly felt that concerning some things she was quite hopeless. The child would make life livable and interesting to her, but in the background there would always be the pitiless fret of uncongenial companionship, and she could only meet it with such calm and callous fortitude as she could acquire. He looked stealthily across at the man into whose keeping Fate had given her happiness, and he felt his own hope go down to zero. She would play her part, of course, and meet the world with a brave face; but what might she not eventually lose in the combat of hope and sweetness and wholesome gaiety! Oswald Grant's thin face, with that loose lower lip, looked unusually pinched and sour that afternoon. During the week he had had one or two strokes of bad luck, and whatever his temperamental gaiety over good fortune, he was quite incapable of facing ill. A mule had died of horse-sickness, and a bad swarm of locusts had swept bare several acres of forage.

All the week Joyce had borne the brunt of it. Now it was the doctor's turn.

"No one works harder than I do," he was saying complainingly, "scarcely anyone as hard; but what do I gain by it? Look at those acres. Yesterday a carpet of green; to-day as bare as the back of my hand."

"But you have only lost a small portion," the doctor said cheerfully. "I hear some of your neighbours have lost all."

"Their own fault entirely. I haven't lost all, because I drove them all day long. Most of the farmers round drive for about an hour and then give it up. Of course, if I tried to farm out here on their principle of *laissez-faire*, I don't know how we should keep out of the Bankruptcy Court. I just slave and slave—it's a life of slavery—and as a reward my mules die and the locusts eat my forage."

"The Irresponsibles don't seem to find it slavery," in the same cheerful voice.

"The Irresponsibles!" in unutterable scorn. "Why, look at their farm! Look at the weeds! Look at the sheds all falling to pieces! I'd be ashamed to own such a place. Look how they live! Certainly they pay their bills in the long run, but it's generally by selling their crops before they're planted. I'd be ashamed to live such a hand-to-mouth existence." He cut himself a large slice of cake and looked at it pettishly: "I wish to goodness that boy would cook the food. Nothing is ever properly done."

"It was my fault," said Joyce. "I sent him to The Knoll with a note, and forgot to make up the fire."

"As I was just going to say," he continued, "this is no country for a hard-working, conscientious man. You get no help, and no credit. The Agricultural Department cares about as much for the farmer as for the Chinese in Johannesburg, and the Native Department the same. You might get attention through being a good tennis player, or a good golfer, or a fashionable society man. I'm none of these. I work hard, desperately hard, and I can never get a single request attended to. It's a country for incompetent gasbags and athletes; and if you're not above a shady deal or two you'll probably make rapid progress. I've gone straight all my life, and I've had little enough but a hard fight, and small gain in return."

He leaned his head on his arm, resting his elbow on the

table and played with the crumbs on his plate with a heavy, sulky expression.

"I've had a thorough sickening of it this week. I sent to the Agricultural Department about the mules and the locusts, and all the answer they seem to have is that they don't know, or that they haven't time, or something. I sent to the Native Department for boys, and they haven't got any. Yet Bulstrode got a gang of ten only this week. That's because he neglects his farm to play tennis every Saturday and is the champion. I'm sick of the whole show. Heaven only knows how most of the Heads of the Departments got their billets, but merit is at a discount, because there is no demand for it."

Joyce drank her tea and made no sign, till at a little wakeful cry in the next room she sprang up and vanished with what the doctor could only feel was a thankful escape.

Oswald got up also, but there was no lifting of his face. He slouched across the room for his pipe, and continued in the same whining voice :

"Take my advice, doctor, and if you want any appreciation or satisfaction out of life, let your principles go. As I say, I've gone straight always. I've never done any man down, and I'm a regular church-goer when there's a church in reach ; and here I am at thirty-eight, earning a paltry three hundred pounds a year by slaving for it, in a foreign land."

"I'm afraid I haven't any principles to let go," the doctor answered ; "and after all, you know, you Christians proclaim that the wicked shall flourish like a green bay tree, or something to that effect."

Oswald looked up quickly, with an air of disapproval. "Ah !" he said ; then added : "I'm afraid I haven't much patience with unbelievers. It is all so perfectly simple to me."

The doctor vouchsafed no reply, and fearing he might be drawn against his will into an argument, suddenly decided to walk on to The Knoll and see Beauty after all. He was none too pleased, however, when Oswald took it into his head to accompany him.

"I haven't been up for a long time," he said, "and the change will do me good."

"Does he never think his wife wants a change ?" was the doctor's inward comment ; and then aloud he asked :

"Couldn't we take Mrs. Grant with us? It wouldn't hurt her to ride slowly."

"What! and that tiny baby?" in surprise. "Really, I think he is too young to pay calls yet. Besides, there is only a mule to ride now, and they are busy ploughing. It would be most inconvenient to spare one."

The doctor said no more, and they started off together, leaving Joyce on the verandah with her baby in her arms.

"We're going to talk simplicities now," was her smiling farewell, as the doctor hovered near while her husband gave some orders to a boy. "Somehow, with a little child, it's all so simple and natural there might be no 'ologies' at all."

"I'm very glad to hear it. Get all the refreshment you can," and with a cheery glance he went off.

But when he was gone the shadow crept back to her face, and she looked long and wistfully at the kopjes with a great hunger in her eyes.

"If we could only steal away in the night, Baby, just you and I," she whispered, "and fly back across the sea to Devon, how happy—oh! how gloriously happy we should be."

The fancy pleased her, and she rambled on, holding the little downy head against her cheek.

"When you were a little bigger, I would show you where the cowslips grow in the cliff-hollows down by the sea, and you should sleep on a soft bed of primroses while the waves sang you a lullaby, and I watched at your side and together we would find the nursery rocks where all the little seagulls live together while they are learning to fly. Sometimes we would take off our shoes and stockings and let the wavelets kiss our feet, and sometimes we would sit quite still and watch the big ships go by, dreaming all sorts of wonderful dreams beside a dreaming sea." Big tears suddenly filled her eyes and she strained the little creature nearer to her heart. "Oh, my baby boy," she breathed, "how am I ever to give you the heavenly childhood that I had; with the little fisher-children and the boats and the sailors, and the sands, and the sun-kissed sea?" A spasm of dread crossed her eyes as she looked round on the tall, unbending kopjes, and the dry, rank grass that clothed their lower slopes. "What will you ever gain out of this," she said, "to compare with all I had in my childhood's heaven? Ah! I must take you

home; surely—surely life will be good and let me take you soon. How can I let you grow up and never play in fields of buttercups and daisies, nor build castles on the sand, nor laugh and dance with other little children."

She put up her hand and brushed the tears back hastily. "How silly I am," trying to rally herself. "Of course we shall go home some day, while you are still my baby boy. We will try to go in foxglove time, when the evenings are long and warm, and the crimson foxgloves stand out against the deep blue sea like banners of Summer. We will live in a tiny cottage, just you and I, and no one will worry us with moods and discontent. We will be like the flowers and the birds and live in the sunshine, dreaming and playing beside the sea!"

The child's violet eyes watched her dreamily, while a little smile hovered round the tiny mouth. She held him up so that one small hand could clutch at her face, and laughed softly over the exquisite thrill at his touch.

And so, while the shadows lengthened, and the silence wrapped them round—that Rhodesian silence which is as a thing one can see and hear—the outline of the sentinel kopjes took on a softer hue, and the dried-up grass melted to a light covering in the waning light, and the wonderful colours of a Rhodesian sunset decked in unspeakable loveliness the heavens above. And in the hush the romance of evening, and the mysterious coming of the stars, whispered a dreamy sense of peace to the sad-eyed mother and her little one, clinging to each other with a clasp that held a whole world of rapture, proof against any outward storm.

CHAPTER XII

CONCERNING SAINTS, SINNERS, AND A PUDDING

"QUITE a Freaks' day out," was Dinah's summing-up to Beauty, as she and Jim and Billy fell to on a savoury supper of young buck, to be followed by a remarkable pudding that Beauty informed them proudly he had concocted himself.

"Some of your ladies up here are quite smart. and some look rather as if they had been dug up. But I like your

men," reaching across and taking the red-currant jelly out of Billy's hands before he had taken it all. "By your leave, I'm not going to be left out of that." Then running on: "They really *are* men. I saw about half a dozen I could have fallen in love with on the spot, which speaks well for their stature, as I never look at a man under five feet ten."

"And after that, do they go up in your estimation accordingly?" asked Jim. "Because a pair of stilts might come in handy if one were thinking of proposing."

"Try two pairs," laughed Dinah. "But you must rig up a telephone, or I mightn't hear what you say."

"Don't get argumentative, Jim," said Beauty. "I've had St. Oswald here for nearly an hour, and I'm suffering badly from fatigue. The locusts have eaten a few acres of his forage. *His* forage, mind you! They had not even the decency to discriminate between the forage of saints and sinners."

"He should put up a notice," remarked Dinah; "the locusts couldn't be expected to know it by the look of him. Let's get a board and put one up for him: 'Dearly Beloved Locusts, a Saint lives here, who works twenty-five hours a day without a murmur; drinks only lime-juice, and never says 'Damn.' It is therefore requested that you leave his forage untouched, and pass on to that of the Three Scoundrels who live next door. They being young and lusty, and full of beans, do no work at all, abhor lime-juice, and use expressions that darken the atmosphere and set fire to the grass. Attend, O Locusts, and fret not the Lord's anointed!' When you've done fingering the loaf, Billy, I'll cut off the outside and have a little."

"He's lost a mule of horse-sickness as well," continued Beauty, "and he had a great deal to say about the Agricultural Department that was unconsciously very humorous."

"I suppose they ought to have saved his mule alive, in the same way that the locusts should have spared his forage?" from Billy. "There's something, after all, to be said in favour of that Department's calm and placid indifference to the farming interests. They couldn't possibly do all that is expected of them, so they do nothing."

"It seems he asked for a syringe and some preparation to keep the locusts off, and he somehow got the reply that, having discovered most of the syringes already supplied to farmers were used only for watering flower-beds and cleaning windows, they were not thinking of supplying any more. He was particularly humorous over that, because he saw in it another instance of the extraordinary way in which the wicked triumph."

"How interesting if he were to turn wicked!" exclaimed Dinah. "I believe I'd stay out here to see it. There'd be hope for that poor child yet. Not that he could. How few people understand what a lot of character it takes to be a villain! I believe I'd go to the devil myself, if I had the pluck, just by way of experience."

"Lawson and I solemnly assured him that there was only one road to success, and that was the worship of the Mammon of Unrighteousness. He got up to go shortly afterwards, and we wondered if it was a sudden recollection of the inadvisability of breaking bread with sinners. Before he left he remarked it would be a good idea to prop up that side of the forage-shed that is falling down, to weed the lucerne, and to plant barley below the orange trees. I said I'd mention it to you two."

"Sounds horribly like work," from Jim. "I don't mind telling the boy to plough, if you chaps will do the rest."

"It seems a pity to prop the shed up now," added Billy, "because it's been like that so long we've got used to it. Besides, there wouldn't be anything to bet on. I made half-a-crown over it last Sunday."

"Then I reckon that half-crown belongs either to the Syndicate or to me," announced Dinah. "There can be no private trading allowed. What about this pudding, Beauty?" making a wry face. "Are you sure you washed your hands before making it, or had you just been cleaning your gun? It has a flavour I generally associate with Bucket. He never washes his hands at all, and he always makes the bread, for choice, just after preparing game."

"He'll get half the kitchen at his head if I ever catch him at it," remarked Billy decidedly.

"My dear boy, he's had more than two-thirds of it already. There is scarcely a saucepan left with a handle on it, and the tin mugs are all dented. As his head happens

to be cast iron, I really don't think anything will affect it except an hour or so in the oven."

"I think I'd better turn cook-boy," said Beauty; "a pound a month would nearly keep me in cigarettes, and now the hot weather is coming, nothing could be nicer than a bit of limbo for clothes. I wonder if Bucket would sell me his wife? He says he bought her for ten pounds because she was a widow. If she was a tenner secondhand, she ought to go very cheap now."

"You wouldn't be cheap at two shillings a month, if all your puddings were like this," said Jim, making another wry face. "Sure, it isn't common or garden mud? It tastes like it."

"Don't grouse," said Billy, who had not yet commenced on his portion. "Eat and be thankful. For my part, I think it was noble of Beauty to make a pudding at all."

"I thought they paid for their wives in cattle?" questioned Dinah of Beauty.

"So they do. The new article is worth about three cows at seven pounds each. There's a place in the North where they can be had for a couple of fowls. If I were a black man I'd move there without delay."

Billy, with a sudden air of gravity, sat looking at his pudding.

"Cheer up, Pink'un," quoth Jim; "Beauty says he *did* wash his hands."

"It's not the pudding," replied Billy solemnly. "I've got an idea."

"Good Lord! Hold it tight, if it has anything to do with the farm. We haven't had an idea between us since Beauty made his new irrigation furrow run uphill six months ago."

"It has. It's a ripper! Can't think why we never thought of it before. Here we are, stuck for cattle and no money to buy any." There was a moment's pause, then he finished impressively: "How many cows do you think Dinah would fetch?"

"Dinah will fetch you one apiece all round with the leg of buck in about two minutes," she exclaimed, as Beauty and Jim started chuckling; but Billy continued incorrigibly: "How many has Burnett got? Only half a dozen? No good at all. And St. Oswald wouldn't be likely to buy at any price. She'll have to go to Madeira's

kraal. The old chief has got a cool hundred there. We'll take seventy-five."

"You flatter me," with emphasis.

"Not at all," graciously. "No one imagines you are worth seventy-five, but niggers have to do as they are told."

"The question is whether we mightn't do even better in Matabeleland," said Jim. "I don't want to increase Miss Webberley's vanity, but I think she might be put down at a hundred."

"It seems to me," chimed in Beauty, "that the best plan would be to put her up for auction. If we can get Burnett, and the doctor, and Major Egerton, and one or two others, all bidding against each other, we might end by having quite a decent little cattle ranche."

"I hope the Field-Marshal will win," put in Dinah, "because he wears such nice boots."

"It's highly probable," from Jim, "as he might do a deal with his Company's cattle. They own a thousand or two. What a sensation at the next Board Meeting, when an item was read out, 'One wife for the Managing Director, two hundred cows and one hundred bullocks.'"

The three chuckled more than ever here, while Dinah got up and shook the crumbs from her lap.

"You're all quite mad," she said. "Why they muzzle the poor dogs out here, and let such as you go free, I can't imagine. I suppose you've observed," addressing Jim, "that Beauty has not touched his own pudding! That confirms my belief that he did *not* wash his hands and that the eggs were bad."

"It wouldn't be so bad if you couldn't see it," said Billy; "but it's positively the most evil-looking concoction in appearance I've ever struck."

"It's not the look of it," suggested Jim, "it's the smell. If one could eat it without smelling it!"

"As a matter of fact, it's the taste," Beauty informed them placidly. "I didn't find out until too late that I'd put Keating's Powder in for ginger."

"You horror!" exclaimed Dinah. "I knew I was getting poisoned."

Billy sprang up in alarm, while Jim commenced hurling various portable articles at Beauty's head.

"Get a stomach-pump, quick," Billy cried. "Think of that cattle ranche! The Field-Marshal has been known to

buy some odd things in his time, but even he would draw the line at a mummy for a wife."

"You needn't trouble," she replied, making for the door; "I feel as if I was on the 'briny' already. If you two don't break Beauty's head for him——" and she vanished precipitously.

"I'm not quite sure that it was Keating's Powder," called Beauty; "it might have been only fuller's earth, and I did wash my hands."

CHAPTER XIII

A HOME IN THE WILDERNESS

It was about a week later that Burnett asked Dinah to ride with him into the Enterprise District, to visit his friends the Chaldecotts, who were farming twenty-two miles out of Salisbury.

She assented readily enough, delighted at the prospect of a fourteen miles' ride into a part unknown to her.

Burnett had planned the outing with a motive he did not choose to analyze, and he only smiled his slow, enigmatical smile when the doctor, lounging with his hands in his pockets on the verandah to see him start, said: "Better turn tail, Ted, and ride in the opposite direction. It isn't always cowardly to run away."

"I should have to come back if I did," Burnett told him. "Go and shoot a brace of partridges for dinner, and don't feed that vivid imagination of yours with so many improbabilities."

"I notice you don't invite me to accompany you," laughed the doctor; "I think you ought to take me as chaperon."

"If I needed one I should," was Burnett's parting shot, with a backward smile; "you'd make a capital old lady."

Then he cantered off to the spot where he and Dinah were to meet, light-hearted enough in the invigorating atmosphere and with such a pleasant day of companionship ahead.

This unanalyzed motive, that he so carefully tried to ignore, was briefly a wish to introduce Dinah to Mrs. Chaldecott.

Since she, Dinah, continued so determined not to see anything permanently attractive about this Rhodesian life, which he found so fascinating, it seemed to him to be a good idea to take her to see some one who had managed to find abundant compensations. He argued with himself that it was a pity for her to return home, condemning colonial life when it undoubtedly held these compensations, and then he resolutely dismissed the subject.

Why he specially thought it a pity he was still loth to admit.

So in the bright morning sunshine, with a delicious breeze to temper the hot sun, they rode gaily away into the distance.

Tall kopjes, mostly blackened for a short season by the veldt fires, but with crests of green trees and mystical lights and shades, and wonderful blue veils wrought of Africa's translucent atmosphere, hemmed them in on every side for the first six miles. In and out and round about wound the beaten track, passing a lonely homestead here, and sighting another there; lonely homes of lonely women who have become reconciled cheerfully, or who have seen desire die in hopelessness, or have loved the solitude from the first. Then the merging into an open grass plain, fringed by tall kopjes with gleaming granite sides, like a lake hidden in the solitude of the mountains. Dinah was enchanted. Of a truth it was a beautiful land, this far Rhodesia, with its hills and vleis, and wonderful, wonderful skies.

She spoke her admiration, and her companion smiled covertly.

"You will allow it some charm, then?" he asked, glancing at her sideways. "It is not all barren wilderness."

"Some?" she echoed. "Why, certainly, I will allow it a great deal; but I will not admit that it contains the elixir of life you want to claim for it. For a man there is a certain amount of excitement from his shooting, and from an adventurous point of view; but I am inclined to think you all get steeped in your precious kopjes, like the Indians in opium, and you develop a tendency to just bask in the sun and get no 'forrader,' because it is so warm and pleasant and simple."

"The Simple Life," he interposed. "And surely that is praiseworthy?"

"For idiots, and meek young curates, and foolish eldest

sons," contemptuously. "But it isn't the way empires are built, and chasms bridged, and mountains bored, and highways cut, and continents watered. What an eloquent sentence!" breaking off with a little laugh. "Do you know, I think the world has lost something of an orator in me; when I get wound up I can talk beautifully."

He laughed too, seizing her lightness of mood. "You ought to know my mother," he said; "she would love you for a sentence like that. She's all energy, you see, and a great organizer and worker. A public benefactor generally."

"And her eldest son spends his vigorous years playing at farming among the kopjes in Rhodesia. What irony! How does she take it?"

"Well, a little hardly at first, but with admirable common sense now. She hunts up useful recipes for me, and tells me how to make Devonshire cream, and what to do for snake-bites and sun-strokes, and various different ways of cooking a guinea-fowl."

Dinah laughed happily, and then added, with a touch of seriousness:

"You know I'm rather sorry for Rhodesia, because men of your stamp, and The Irresponsibles, are not the right kind to give her a good start. Even St. Oswald is better than you, for there's nothing like a good grouser to push a thing along. But you easy-going, happy-go-lucky, don't-care-a-damn gentleman-farmers will only make a sort of playground of her, for the men who don't want the bother of being strenuous at home. Any man who wants to stroll about with his gun, instead of sticking to hard work, will contrive to drift out here and bask in the sunshine."

"It's pretty expensive, though," he reasoned. "If you don't happen to have private means, or at any rate not less than £800 capital, you'll probably go under. That is why it is so difficult for the genuine hard-working emigrant to come here."

"What is it?" questioningly. "Prohibitive prices?"

"Mostly that. Living is dear, and farms that are any use are dear, and the Mining Industry gets most of the consideration, and there appears to be a special disease for every different kind of stock; and floods lying in wait for whatever the locusts leave. But the outlook is more hopeful again now, as the Chartered Company have sent an

expert out to watch over the agricultural interests, and develop farming generally."

"In any case I expect you would all stay?"

"We stay because we love Rhodesia, and because we believe she will pull through to prosperity some day."

"No," she asserted; "you stay because you are kopje-struck, and sunshine-struck, and nothing else appeals to you any longer. If you did not believe in her ultimate prosperity you would stay just the same."

"Perhaps," he agreed, and they rode on a short distance in silence.

"But you must admit it is hard on the women," she continued. "I remember a girl writing to me from some part of Africa, and saying the life was like a sparklet syphon with the sparklet left out. She sometimes hardly knew how to go on. That sort of thing makes me fume, you know. Life has no business to be so hard on women. It is a favourite trick of hers to give us brains teeming with life and eagerness, and then so arrange circumstances that we are tumbled into a vault-like existence almost before we know it. After that, of course, being a woman, you've got to grin and bear it, or get stones thrown at you for the rest of your natural life. Take Joyce Grant for an instance. She might as well be a turnip or a barn-door fowl, for an existence like hers. And that odious person who is her husband pats himself on the back positively, blatantly, because he considers he showed such perspicacity in choosing for his wife a girl who had always lived in the country and never been gay. Such utter drivel! If he'd chosen a round-faced, sloppy, domesticated labourer's daughter, there might have been some sense in it. He could have held forth to her on potatoes and mealies and the Grace of God till further notice, and she could have adored his cleverness from a becomingly humble distance. But Joyce Grant! Good Heavens! she's got more in her little finger than he has in his whole body, and life just pushed her into it."

"I think you rather overstate it all, you know," he suggested pleasantly. "Mrs. Grant is getting along very nicely now. I daresay she wouldn't care to change."

"Getting along!" with scorn. "Why, that's what the drivers, and crossing-sweepers, and charwomen manage to do. I tell you that people blessed with brains have a certain *right* to living, and not merely existing, and life

has no business to deny it. Getting along ! I only wonder she didn't cut her throat before that baby came. It passes my comprehension how she won through at all. Just imagine that man, morning, noon, and night, and these exasperating house-boys, and the awful silence, and—— No, I won't imagine it. It makes me ache. I'm a woman, you see, and I know."

" Surely there was still plenty of room for hope ? "

" Of course there was, or she wouldn't have stuck it." She paused, then added, with a totally unexpected note of wistfulness: " Well, apparently Hope took pity on her and came to the rescue. I foresee a possibility of my vivid, varied life subsiding into a wearied *blaséness*, after all, while she is still quietly full of hope and eagerness for the boy at school, who is to do such wonderful things when he is a man." She whipped up her horse suddenly, and bounded forward at a gallop. " Come along," she cried. " Sentiment is worse than indigestion ; I flee it, as one is commonly supposed to flee the evil one."

He could only gallop after her, but it was with a sudden quickening of his pulses. " Perhaps, after all——" He stopped short. " But who would have expected her to speak like that ? "

Mrs. Chaldecott came out to meet them with a bright smile of welcome, while two sturdy, bonny children eyed them with a calmly quizzical stare from the verandah.

" Did you see Ronald about anywhere ? " she asked ; " he's out on the farm in the direction of the road."

" We saw an apparition in the distance," Burnett replied, " that might have been your husband, or might have been a scarecrow."

" That was he, of course," she cried ; " and you might well take him for a scarecrow. My back was turned for a moment, and I just saw him vanishing later, in his oldest pair of dungarees, with a torn shirt, and a hat without any crown except a lettuce leaf. He's quite hopeless," addressing Dinah. " As sure as I have visitors, he contrives to get into the oldest and most disreputable garments he possesses."

" How delicious of him ! " was Dinah's comment. " But I'm sure dungarees are more respectable than the shorts Jim went off trekking in this morning. I'm so glad you didn't contrive to prevent him appearing in his war-paint."

She gathered up her habit, and followed her hostess to

the house, built in the midst of the grass plain, in its setting of kopjes ; and Dinah promptly lost her heart, as Burnett wished and intended she should, to the tall, bright, handsome Englishwoman, who had been so successful in finding compensations.

He left them to chat together until the dungaree-clad husband arrived, and devoted himself to his two special friends, the bonny, wide-eyed children ; and by the shrieks of merriment that proceeded from their corner of the verandah it was evident he was no awe-inspiring stranger. He greatly amused the grown-ups later by telling them how both children had tucked their dolls under their jerseys, and were jumping round with them ; and how when he asked them what they were doing, they informed him they were Kangaloos, and Kangaloos always carried their babies in their jerseys.

But it was not until the afternoon, when the men strolled off to see the new tobacco beds, and the children slept peacefully, that Dinah broached the subject of colonial farm life.

" I couldn't bear it," she said frankly. " The monotony would drive me raving mad."

Her companion looked at her with a slightly amused expression. " You would soon get used to it," she said. " Of course, it isn't perhaps exactly what one would choose, but it's a lot better than being only a number in some suburban road of jerry-built villas, isn't it ? And then one can go to Salisbury fairly often, if you have a lady-help, and there are such lots of nice people there, and a good deal going on. The shooting parties are good fun, too, and I have nice neighbours within five miles. It might be so very much worse."

Dinah made no comment, but she suddenly asked : " I suppose you know our neighbours the Grants ? "

" Yes, but not very well. Mrs. Grant is a nice little thing, but one rarely sees her anywhere. She is rather out of the way for us. How is her baby ? "

" Splendid, I believe, but I don't know much about babies. He always looks rather as if he had been drinking to me ; too much ' help yourself and pass the bottle,' " she added humorously.

" My baby girl is very amusing," Mrs. Chaldecott told her ; " she keeps us all alive. She couldn't finish her pudding at lunch yesterday, so I told her she might give it

to her piccanin nurse-boy, and a minute later we heard her say witheringly to him, 'Take 'ore 'poon, an' eat it like a lady.' "

The men rejoined them at tea-time, and Dinah, who had quickly become on excellent terms with her host, greatly amused the others by asking him why he apparently delighted in building wobbly-looking huts, in a promiscuous fashion, all about his front door. Ronald Chaldecott protested that he had no front door, and the wobbliness was entirely her imagination.

He made an attractive picture in spite of his attire, leaning up against a verandah post, with his hands in the pockets of his blue copper-riveted dungarees, his crownless hat on the back of his head, and the typical Rhodesian devil-may-care twinkle in his eyes.

"But, all the same, you don't pride yourself as an architect, do you?" she persisted. "You wouldn't, for instance, consider this a Renaissance verandah?" glancing roguishly at the impromptu, ungainly, home-made stoep, with which he had casually adorned one side of their pretty new house. "I only wonder," she added, "that you dare lean against one of the posts."

"If Ron had a palace," laughed his wife, "and the sun came in at one window inconveniently, he would rig up an ungainly, home-made shelter, if the fancy took him, with the greatest *sang-froid*."

"And wear copper-riveted garments too, I suppose?"

"They're splendid!" and the wearer slapped his knee with appreciation. "Why don't you wear them, Burnett? They knock spots out of ordinary khaki slacks."

"Now there I really must protest," Dinah demurred. "We have christened Captain Burnett Sir Galahad, and a Sir Galahad in copper-riveted dungarees is quite beyond my imagination."

The baby girl interrupted here by toddling up to the group with a grimy object in her hand, which proved to be a nigger boy's skin purse. Her engaging little face was wreathed in smiles as she pushed through to her mother, with an eager expression of some important discovery, and holding up the uninviting looking object, exclaimed joyfully, "Mummy! Hark to the smell!"

Dinah snatched her up and kissed her, and then put her down suddenly, as if she were half-ashamed to be showing so much feeling over a child.

And, later, when they rode home quickly through the darkening shadows, she chatted about anything and everything except the home they had just left. If she was impressed in any degree, she resolutely hid it.

"Charming, all of them," was all she would reply to her companion's queries. "What a good thing for new countries there are some women as plucky and sensible as your friend Mrs. Chaldecott."

Then she changed the subject, and would vouchsafe him no further opinion, trying to hide even from herself that some unaccountable sense of depression was making gaiety an effort.

CHAPTER XIV

OF LIGHT AND SHADE

JIM's trek, the garments for which Dinah had alluded to as "shorts," was a little matter of twenty miles about some mealies for a mine. He started at daybreak one morning, lazed in the middle of the day, and reached his destination in the evening. The following afternoon he arrived at the Grants' on his return journey, without having apparently turned a hair.

"May I show myself, Mrs. Grant?" he called through the open door. "I'm not dressed for calling, but I'd love a cup of tea."

Joyce hastened to greet him with undisguised pleasure, and laughed frankly at the apparition he appeared in knickerbockers cut off just below the thighs, and stockings reaching only to his knees.

He laughed too, glancing down at his legs.

"Miss Webberley taunts us with doing no work, so yesterday morning I made a point of drawing her attention to my workmanlike costume, and asked her if she considered twenty miles a day mere play. She retorted that I was indecent, and she should certainly spend the morning making kilts for my next journey. How's the Great Mogul?" as Joyce bustled about, getting tea for him.

"Do you mean Oswald? He's gone to Salisbury."

"Oswald? No. husbands don't count any more when

there's a son and heir. Where is the youngster? Can he box yet?"

"He's busy studying the atmosphere just now, I believe, out on the verandah, guarded by a minute piccanin not much older than himself."

Jim went out and picked up the small bundle caressingly—which was about the last thing in the world anyone would have expected of him.

"Gad! what a fine little chap!" he exclaimed. "Don't you ever give me away, Mrs. Grant—but I adore babies. They're the funniest little animals of the whole lot."

Joyce watched him happily, and wondered if the irony of Fate would leave him a bachelor, and lose some little unborn animals an adorable father.

Jim had always been her favourite of The Irresponsibles; partly because she understood him the best, and partly because, of the three, he would oftenest risk being bored by her husband to come and talk to her. And only to see the way he now looked at her treasure made her whole heart go out to him.

She was specially glad he had come to day, because she was feeling a little depressed over her mother-in-law's first letter concerning the precious grandson. It had contained a great many "Oh's!" and "Ah's!" and much reference to the special goodwill of Providence towards the baby's noble father. She had been implored to teach the baby as early as possible to emulate his father in everything—and here the scapegrace younger brother, who had evidently been allowed as a special favour to read the letter, had inscribed in brackets, "Teach him to sing 'I'm following in father's footsteps'—ripping good song." "Let him be taught that he comes of a noble race," ran a sentence Joyce knew she would inevitably find, and she felt quite grateful to the aforesaid scapegrace for inserting here: "Blue blood, and generally a black eye or two from brawling. Teach him to hit out straight from the shoulder in case he proves a throw back, and takes after his illustrious ancestor 'Poacher Jim.'"

Lastly came the dreaded conclusion, "If dear Oswald can possibly afford your passage home next year, I should dearly like to see my grandson, and should enjoy having you both here for three months; when, dear Joyce, we could together train his infant mind in paths of righteousness." And, beside this, the scapegrace had added:

"Cheer up! I'll see you through if I'm still alive, and we'll train his infantine majesty to box and prizefight."

Joyce had put the letter away with a sense of dread. Would they ever leave her her baby to herself? Would they ever even let her make a man of him? She had clutched the small bundle hungrily in her arms. "Oh, we can't go there, Baby," she had cried; "we should both die of it. We must—must—must go to Devon somehow, and forget for a little while."

The baby had regarded her solemnly for a moment, and then smiled a little roguish smile that gave him a sudden likeness to the scapegrace, and made Joyce hug him ecstatically, exclaiming, "Oh! you little imp! you're getting ready to sing that song already! How Uncle Reggie will love you!"

But it was the oppression that stayed longest, and Jim saw it lurking behind her smile when he came in.

"You'll be glad enough of his company," he said as they sat chatting over their tea on the verandah, with the baby solemnly contemplating them from the floor.

Joyce only smiled softly—assent seemed superfluous. "It's been jolly nice having Dr. Lawson and Miss Webberley out here," he ran on; "but I suppose they'll soon both be going, and then we shall miss them badly."

"Has Miss Webberley quite decided to go when her three months are up?" She looked half curiously into his open, engaging face with its air of manliness and independence. Jim was almost plain enough to be called ugly, and he was rather short and squat as well, like a very square, homely, loaf of brown bread, Dinah had once said; but from his schooldays onward—with men and women—he had been invariably the popular man of his circle.

"I think there is not much doubt of it," still watching the baby with undisguised interest. "She's a ripper all round; but she'd die of boredom out here. Do you know, I believe he will be a boxer—he's got a sort of boxing action with his fists already?"

"He'll probably be a footballer as well," with a smile, "for he has a great action with his feet. Where is Miss Webberley this afternoon?"

"Do you think he'd mind if I picked him up?" unheeding her question. "I won't break him or anything——"

"Of course he wouldn't . . . he'd love it—it's what he's been wanting ever since we began tea."

"I'll walk him about a bit," getting up. "You can't imagine how pleased I feel with myself carrying a baby about. I've got some nieces and nephews, you know. I wouldn't have those other chaps see me, though," as he paraded the small bundle round. "I always did love babies, especially fine little chaps like this."

A colour was creeping into Joyce's cheeks, and her eye literally shone. "Is he really a fine little chap?" she asked, shyly. "I always think it's perhaps my imagination, and am afraid my being so ill—may have—may have——"

"Why, he's the grandest little chap I've ever seen," interrupting her, with a sudden pang in his kind heart at her pathetic devotion, and his belief that the pretty babe would grow up fragile. "You should just hear Miss Webberley sing his praises. You were asking where she was? She had arranged to ride down to the Chaldecotts' with Burnett to-day. Did you hear about the trick Beauty played us over the pudding the other day?" And he amused her with a comprehensive account, telling her, also, of their chaff with Dinah about the cows. Joyce made a charming listener, entering instantly into the spirit of whatever she was told, and it was after an hour of mutual enjoyment he started on the last stage of his journey.

He found Dinah and her cavalier just returned, the former in seemingly reckless spirits, and Burnett a little quieter than usual. Jim joined them as they were sitting down to dinner and the mirth grew uproarious. Beauty was just relating how Bulstrode, a neighbouring farmer, had looked in for a cup of tea, and had mentioned among other things, that he had caught his cook-boy that morning straining the coffee through one of his socks. Billy pushed his soup plate away hastily, saying he could eat no more, and Dinah exclaimed in a horror-struck voice: "Why, perhaps Bucket uses Billy's socks!" "Why mine?" he asked in a hurt voice, and added in a manner that made them nearly cry with laughter: "By Jove! if I ever catch him at it, there'll be a strange face below in the morning!"

Jim then chimed in with an account of a call he had made the previous day while on his journey.

"It was just tea-time," he explained, "and as I was close to old Brown's, I thought I'd go in for a cup of tea. I knew M^s. Brown wouldn't mind my attire, and I always enjoy a yarn with the old buck. Just as I got up to the

house I heard girls' voices, and I began to wish I hadn't come—or else that I had Miss Webberley's promised kilts. However, the old man had already seen me, and he dragged me in with a most effusive welcome, and shouted to his missus to bring tea. To be on the safe side, I discreetly took a seat at the table, and pulled the tablecloth over my knees, but I had scarcely arranged it to my satisfaction, when the door opened and a blushing maiden of about sixteen made her appearance. 'One of my daughters just home from school,' said old Brown proudly, and of course I had to stand up, still clutching at the tablecloth and make my bow. I was rather relieved, however, that she went out at a door on the opposite side." He paused to take a mouthful, and then proceeded with a delightful touch of Irish brogue, which he often slipped into when yarning: "I thought I was all right then, and breathed freely, but in less than five minutes the first door opened again, and another blushing maiden appeared. Of course, I had to go through the same pantomime, but, oddly enough, she, too, went out at the opposite door. Five minutes later a third one appeared, and I was so taken aback, I stared at her open-mouthed, and found afterwards I was holding the tablecloth somewhere round my waist, when she followed suit in disappearing at the door, which evidently should have been marked Exit. I began to feel thoroughly uncomfortable, and wonder if I was really and truly insupportable. Finally I sounded the old man: 'I thought you had only one daughter?' I remarked pleasantly, 'and that she was in England?' 'Only one daughter!' he exclaimed. 'Three, as I live, bless their bonny faces.' 'Bless their bonny backs,' thought I, and wished I had foregone that tea-time thirst. However, Mrs. Brown brought the tea in and was very homely, and I comforted myself the pantomime was over."

"Of course, it wasn't?" broke in Dinah eagerly.

"Good Lord, no! I'm afraid to say how many times those shy, blushing maidens came in at one door and went out at the other; but at every fresh entrance, the old man, who was wandering wildly among impossible reminiscences, introduced me afresh in such a way that I could only smile, and stammer like an idiot, and make a fresh bow to a perfectly unabashed and innocent intruder. If he hadn't just told me his daughters numbered three, I should have put them down at thirteen, but under the cir-

cumstances I could only suppose I was the victim either of a very neat practical joke or a strange hallucination. Anyhow, in my confusion, my sense of—er—er—nakedness assumed such proportions, that at the last entry I struggled to get the tablecloth round my neck, and succeeded in upsetting three cups of tea."

So they rambled on, each vying with the other out of imaginations of apparently inexhaustible fertility, till Billy put the finishing touch with his tale about the three Buluwayo prospectors, who went prospecting to Gwanda.

"At Filabusi one pegged out, so they planted him," he explained, "and as a sign of respect, buried a bottle of whisky on his chest—clasped, in fact, to his bosom. Not that he was a hard drinker by any means, but they thought he was the sort of chap who would feel more comfortable immortalized that way, than with angels in a stained-glass window." His face, which, of course, wore its usual innocent expression, broke suddenly into an irresistible smile. "That reminds me of an incident at home," he said, "when the Squire's Son, Eric Black, fell in the Boer war, and the village wanted to erect some sort of memorial to him. He was a good chap, you know, but rather a hard case, and at the Committee meeting there was a discussion, because a drinking fountain on the green was suggested, and some one said it was an insult to his unparalleled capacity to commemorate him in plain water; and then some one else proposed a stained-glass window, with angels bearing his heroic soul to Heaven, and that was objected to because they said if he was in the same window with the angels——" He stopped short and began to laugh at Jim's sudden giggling fit.

"Good old Pink'un!" murmured Beauty, while Dinah boxed his ears, exclaiming:

"You're both profane and coarse, Billy; go on with your prospector yarn."

"I always thought it a pity you had no sense of humour," he retaliated; "but then, of course, you never knew Black. However, to proceed: They buried a full bottle of whisky clasped to his manly bosom, and went on with their journey. A few months later they came back the same road, stony broke, and very thirsty! . . ." He paused suggestively, and amid the general laugh Dinah exclaimed:

"Now you're disgusting! Really, Billy, I'm ashamed of you."

"It's not a nice story, I admit," he said; "but, then, I didn't say it was going to be. As a matter of fact, if I went into detail——" The irresistible twinkle deepened.

"Stop him!" cried Dinah. "Gag him with bread or potato, or anything. I know the mood of old, and if he isn't suppressed——" She got up, spreading out her hands significantly. "Well, I warn you, that's all. Personally, I am going to take a revive on the verandah."

She lighted a cigarette and strolled away to the far end, where she could enjoy it in peace, while continued bursts of laughter from the dining-room broke the silence, and told her the anecdotes were probably none the less amusing for her absence.

Half her reckless gaiety that evening had been a sustained effort to get away from herself and vanquish a mysterious threatening attack of blues. Sentiment, as she had told Ted Burnett, she systematically fled from, but to-night she felt that unless she were specially indomitable, her fleeing would be vain, and even the spirit of sentiment overtake her.

Why had she made that foolish remark to Burnett about growing *blasée* of change and interest, while Joyce Grant was growing more and more blissfully absorbed with her boy's progress? How should she grow weary of change? She of all people—with her restless, energetic spirit, and vivid interests, and immense capacity for enjoyment. How old was she? Twenty-eight—nothing nowadays, when women were young at thirty-eight, and full of life at fifty. Besides, there was no alternative but marriage, and the mere idea was distasteful. Not for all the world did Dinah intend to put her head under the yoke, and have to consult another as to her coming and going, when she had the chance to be so gloriously free. She felt as if Freedom were the breath of life to her, with this haphazard flitting from palatial residence to mud huts, or caravan, or Canadian shanty, as the spirit took her.

As for this Rhodesian farm-life, with its narrow, verveless existence—why, no man could possibly be worth such a giving up of Life's interests. She shook herself impatiently, apostrophizing herself as a fool and an idiot. "What in the world has it to do with you?" she asked—"seeing you have the whole world to roam in, and a

sound head on your shoulders to save you from any irretrievable matrimonial folly."

But even as she said it, it was as though a low laugh sounded among the kopjes, and the stars winked to each other. "She will come back," they seemed to be saying, amid a burst of silent mirth. "She will come back," with growing temerity; and, finally, with ripple upon ripple of that mysterious, secret laughter: "She will come back—to stay."

Dinah turned suddenly, with a quick, passionate movement, to find Beauty beside her.

"For Heaven's sake, sit down and talk to me!" she said. "I'm suffering from a severe attack of mental aberration."

CHAPTER XV

OF A "LITTLE BROWN MOUSE"

BEAUTY sank into the nearest chair, and rested his feet high above his head. "What a glorious night," he said. "I was just coming to ask you what was the matter."

"Why should anything be the matter?" in some surprise, glancing at him keenly in the starlight.

"You just said you were suffering from mental aberration."

"But that doesn't explain why you should have come to look for me, imagining anything was wrong."

"Perhaps not, but it will serve our purpose. I'm a thought-reader, you know, and I easily saw you were a bit off colour to-night, and this retirement to a secluded corner speaks volumes."

"I thought I was considerably wound up," fencing with him; "I felt almost imbecile."

"No good," and Beauty shook his head, while the starlight showed her his perfect profile, white as a piece of carved marble against the blackness behind. A sudden fit of obstinacy and reticence made her go on fencing. "You look perfectly angelic to-night," she told him lightly; "I feel I ought to be trembling with ecstasy at having you all to myself at such a bewitching hour; and vowing eternal spinsterhood if I might not even be your doormat."

He smiled. "I'm so thankful you're doing nothing of the kind. It's so refreshing to feel you are merely regarding me as a piece of statuary, and regretting my effeminate appearance."

She laughed sympathetically. "Does it pall very much to be the centre of adoring worship?"

"It does worse, sometimes. You see, I went through the Boer war, and somehow I always seemed to get landed among the nurses—and then circumstances have condemned me to various voyages on Union Castle, and P. and O. liners, and I'm thirty-two years old. But it's very peaceful out here," with a contented sigh, "and one rarely needs to go to town."

Dinah watched him silently, and that same light of the stars showed her a deepening wistfulness on his face. Suddenly, without in the least knowing why, she said: "Of course, there is someone somewhere?"

"What do you mean by someone somewhere?"

"One woman's face and one woman's personality that has obliterated all the rest?"

"Why do you say of course?"

"I don't know. It has not occurred to me before, but to-night I know it. I only wonder I did not guess sooner. Don't take any notice," as he remained silent, "I will forget again, if you like, but it isn't worth while to deny it."

"I was not thinking of doing so; why should I? I haven't much respect for any man who sneers at love. It's the best thing in the world, anyhow."

She laughed, with a queer little break in her voice that surprised him.

"Listen, I'm going to confess," she said; then, lowering her voice, added: "I'm *afraid* of it. It's the only thing I am afraid of. If I cared for anyone, and things went wrong, I'd go to the devil. Nothing would save me. Knowing this, I mean to keep on the safe side. Do you understand?"

Beauty lounged lower, in a lazy, indolent manner; but that was only his way.

"Silly idea, to be afraid of the best thing in the world. Be afraid of anything else you like, but dare all but that."

"No," a little fiercely, "it is just because one can dare all, and lose all, one is afraid. Things being as they are, the safe side is the side that laughs and forgets. I have enlisted under that banner, and I mean to stick to it."

"You probably will not be consulted. Fate has a little trick of pleasing herself; therefore, it is better, instead of wasting strength resisting, to go with the tide, and laugh and remember."

"That is what you do?"

"It is."

"Ah!" she drew a long breath. "Yet how a night like this must make you ache!"

"It does—but an ache is not necessarily an ill." He paused; then murmured dreamily, half to himself: "Pale hands I love—where are you now—where are you now?"

"Don't," she implored, "it hurts. I'm sure I show great common sense in fleeing sentiment. I feel things so dreadfully if I let myself go."

He watched her quietly.

"I hope you'll get it badly some day," was all his consolation. "However hard one is hit, it is worth it in the long run. I'm a bit of a philosopher, you know, and I've seen it often enough to justify the assertion. It humanizes the human, male or female—and has a way of its own of enriching. Even if it results in what is generally known as going to the devil, I am of the opinion that it is a more satisfactory reason for going than any other; and even there, there might be a lot of interesting things to be learnt."

"You were very hard hit?" she could not resist asking.

He smiled whimsically, in the dim light.

"I am still, if it interests you. But I don't idealize. She is no tall and willowy beauty of proud lineage and high disdain—neither is she a laughing, dainty maiden—nor a gifted brilliant star." He paused; then added very quietly: "Imagine a little brown mouse of a girl, with glossy brown hair, and thin white cheeks, and eyes that are always asking questions which never get answered, and lips that smile tenderly, while the eyes are still grave."

"*Spirituelle?*" murmured Dinah.

"Yes, I suppose so—though it seems too big a word to use to my little brown mouse."

Something in his voice made the tears suddenly rush to her eyes, and the stars glistened in a blurred mist.

"She isn't dead?" she asked softly.

"No, but her father and grandfather died of consumption; her brother is in a consumptive hospital in Switzerland, and she herself is in danger." There was a short

silence; then he added in that whimsical way of his: "You said something one day about we men in Rhodesia getting steeped in sunshine, and losing touch with the outside world. Perhaps some of us choose that way of going to the devil, which, after all, generally means trying to take the sharp edge off some memory that hurts over-much, and steeping oneself in whatever seems to have most of soothing."

"But if you had not let yourself go in the first place," she urged, "if you had kept heart-whole, and free, think what you might have had now!"

"Why, I might have had nothing at all! No—" looking steadily at the stars—"I'm a sentimental idiot, no doubt, but I wouldn't give up my little brown mouse now for anything. Life hasn't given her very much, but she knows what she is to me, and perhaps nothing else would have softened the awful curse in just the same way."

"Oh, you're a saint, of course!" Dinah got up suddenly, and her voice had again that odd little break which she tried to hide with a laugh. "You are one of the few people in the world who are ready to give all and take nothing. I couldn't be like that if I tried. I'm beastly selfish, and not very likely ever to be anything else. But I see how fine it is, and—and—" she moved restlessly—"what are those lines that run:

'Who stand in the dark on the lowest stair,
While affirming of God He is certainly there'?

I don't know where I ever saw them, but they sometimes run in my head. And that's how I feel when I come across something real and big in the way of unselfishness, and plucky acceptance of some hurt. I stand in the dark on the lowest stair—while affirming of Good it is certainly there—and that's about all I can do. I see the spirit in you—and it's in Joyce Grant, with that beautiful face of hers, making the best of her trying existence, and it's in Jim somewhere, waiting till it's wanted—and as for the doctor, he's just one lump of it."

"I'm with you there," was his emphasized rejoinder; "the doctor's on the top stair." Then he added softly: "And so is my little brown mouse."

She made no comment, but stood up before him straight and slim, with her hands behind her back—half turned

away on the edge of the verandah, looking out into the dark shadows of the garden. Beauty lounged yet lower in his chair, and there was a quiet yearning in his eyes that was like a physical pain.

"What is it?" she ran on at last; "and why isn't it in me? Why does a night like this make me ache somewhere behind my brain? I'm not in love, nor ever likely to be—and everyone knows saintship isn't in my line. Only sometimes, as to-night, I seem to get a sudden glimpse outside myself, into the heart of something awe-inspiring and splendid; something I want to kneel down to. Am I going mad, do you think? Or have I got a sun-stroke?" again with that half-laugh that seemed to try to mislead both herself and him.

"Getting abnormally sane perhaps," he suggested, but his voice was very winsome.

"Do you think so?" musingly. "I don't recognize myself, anyhow; but to-night I cannot help thinking about this hidden Power, that is so vaguely splendid. For, of course, it is a Power. I'm not such a fool as not to see goodness is always a Power, however much I dally in the paths of unrighteousness. Only it's not for me. I've got to go the way I lean, and I'm afraid I'm a born drifter."

She paused; then rushed on jerkily, a little as if she were ashamed of her thoughts: "Just think of all the lonely women in the Colonies, so pluckily making a game fight of it. I can't get them out of my mind to-night I don't know why perhaps just because I know I couldn't do it. And then, until one actually comes out here, one hasn't the least idea what colonist loneliness and difficulties are. No cottages, no church spire in the distance—no comfortable, friendly light in a remote farmhouse—no thin blue smoke signalling to one human that another human is there—no familiar graveyard even; no lovers in the gloaming; nothing but a dead level of monotony, often enough pure drudgery. I called the women who put up with it cheerfully 'Home Chatty' women—and 'Beeton and Butterick' women—and I meant it scornfully—but, of course, I know perfectly well they're heroines in reality. Heroines beside whom I ought to hide my diminished head. Only, of course, I don't profess to be anything in that line myself. I'm only a happy-go-lucky globe-trotter, who merely asks to be let alone; but the blue

devils have got me to-night, and if I didn't work all this remarkable sentiment off, my brain might suffer."

"Go ahead," he murmured, "you're only a little more interesting than usual."

"I don't think I've much more to say, except—" fantastically—"that I feel I want to shout across the world, so that every lonely woman making a game fight of it on ranche or mine or farm, could hear—'Bravo! well played!'"

"Hear! hear! Dinah, you're a topping good sort," and Beauty roused himself suddenly, and leant forward to knock the ashes from his pipe.

"I'm not, Beauty, I'm a selfish beast; but to-night I verily believe I'm ashamed of it. I guess I'd better go before I make any more asinine admissions. Be an angel and say good night to Captain Burnett for me, and the others."

But he detained her a moment longer.

"Why did you leave Burnett out?" eyeing her covertly.

"Isn't he worthy a place on the staircase?"

She assumed a gaiety she was far from feeling. "I don't know him so well as the rest of you, but I hope he isn't too near the top. I must have someone to keep me company down at the bottom—in the dark."

She hesitated as if loth to tear herself away, and he continued to watch her covertly, wondering many things.

"You haven't told me now what actually is the matter?" he said.

"Matter?" she echoed; "why, nothing of course, except that I feel even as a dromedary with two humps. Tell the others that. I'm off; good night." And she swung away across the garden to the wattle and daub hut she had chosen for her own special sanctum.

At the door she gave a last fleeting glance round, and drew a long breath.

"You're a fascinating land, you sleepy, sun-steeped Rhodesia but it's time for me to go. It will take me all my diplomacy even now to keep that brick of a man from proposing before I am safely away."

And Ted Burnett rode home looking very grave, conscious that he minded desperately her going off to bed without saying good night after their delightful day.

CHAPTER XVI

AN INVITATION

"GOING home!" . . . Joyce echoed the words with an unmistakable pang in her voice, and paused in her occupation of ironing a baby's robe.

Dinah sat on the other end of the table, swinging her feet.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" she asked. "I'm feeling humpish and it soothes."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Joyce, lowering her eyes. "I thought you would stay much longer. It seems so sudden."

"I only came for three months, and I've been here eleven weeks. So has the doctor. He's going, too."

Joyce was silent, and Dinah eyed her compassionately in secret.

"Good thing you've got that youngster, he'll keep you too busy to be dull for some time to come."

Still Joyce said nothing, bending lower over her ironing.

"Have you named him yet? I came across a baby once named Aristophanes, and the mother was quite hurt because I said it wasn't much of a name to call. Seemed to think I was alluding to him as a dog. Not sure that I wasn't—small boys and puppies seem much the same thing to me."

Suddenly Joyce looked up. "Will you be his godmother?" she asked, a little breathlessly. "I want you and Dr. Lawson."

"I!" in astonished accents. "But, my dear child, don't you take some one else's sins on your shoulders as a godmother? And I'm crowded out already!"

"Do!" urged Joyce, growing bolder. "You and the doctor arrived in Rhodesia the night he was born, and these three months have been the best I have known here because of you and him and baby. You will all three be associated together always; that is why I want it."

"And what says the proud father? Are we good enough? Just plain Cecil Lawson and Dinah Webberley?"

"He will agree," was all Joyce said, knowing in her heart

there would be a tussle, but determined this once to have her way.

"Well, you won't call him Aristophanes, will you?"

"No; he's to be Alan Oswald."

"Alan!" criticizingly. "Yes, that's all right. I'll pass Alan, but we might call him Pip for short, mightn't we? I think he'd like to be called Pip. When are you going to bring him home?"

"Not this year, I'm afraid; perhaps next."

"Well, I'll have you both as long as ever you like, and where you like, if you give me good notice. I'm a terrible rover, you know, but I'll come post haste from the Antipodes to meet you at Southampton if you give me time."

"How good you are!" was all Joyce could stammer.

"Not a bit," flicking her cigarette ash off carefully. "My dear old pater left me a nice bit of brass, and I don't seem to have any encumbrances, and I'd certainly enjoy it as much as you. We'll go down into Devon, if you like, and take a romantic little cottage by the sea, and teach the imp to swim, and row, and fish, and all that. Ripping sport! Why!" jumping up suddenly, "what's the matter? You dear, brave, little soul—you're positively crying!"

Joyce made a frantic effort to banish her tears, but they only fell faster, and at last she let Dinah push her gently into a big chair.

"Now," said Dinah, "have a real cry; it will do you good. You've no business to be ironing those garments on a hot day like this. Why in the world don't the boys do it?" She roved round the room restlessly, considerably more moved than she cared to show. "Don't be a silly little goose and overdo it. You're not made of cast-iron, you know, and you must remember Pip. The doctor told me you used to live in Devon; that's why I suggested it. But if you'd rather go anywhere else——" She paused and leaned over the back of her chair, touching caressingly the sunny hair.

"Oh, no, no!" Joyce breathed ecstatically. "It was just the mere thought of such a treat made me cry. I love every stick and stone in Devon, and I've been so longing to take him there, and fearing I never should. It seemed too good to be true."

"Not a bit of it. We'll work it all right next year, even if I have to come and fetch you. Just live on the

hope of it and forget this," glancing through the open door at the parched, desolate kopjes.

"I shall," hopefully. "It sounds better than my wildest dreams."

Dinah moved round the room again and came back, as one with something on her mind to say, and a difficulty in saying it.

"I can't be sentimental, you know," she began, "or make pretty speeches; but I'd like just to say what a brick you are—and how I admire you, and all that. Of course, I know what this means to a woman with a brain like yours. Even in three months there have been days when I felt like a mouldy pumpkin in a deserted vegetable garden. Certainly it seems as if one might almost as well be a turnip, as stick it for years. And yet you go on so quietly and bravely and uncomplainingly, making the best of it. I'd sooner die myself, but that doesn't prevent my admiring you with every bit of admiration I've got. I'm not sickening for an illness or anything," she finished, with her careless laugh; "but I told Beauty the other night I wanted to shout 'Well played!' across the world to all you plucky colonial women, and I'm just beginning on you—see?"

She continued moving restlessly about the room. "I never believe in waiting till people are dead to praise them; that's why I've made a fool of myself, and tried to make a pretty speech to you."

Joyce smiled through her tears.

"What a dear, wonderful creature you are! I'm not surprised they are all in love with you. I am myself, and I shall almost count the weeks to that stay in Devon. Baby and I will humbly adore you in secret."

"We really must change the subject," laughed Dinah, a little huskily. "In about two minutes I shall be making an asinine attempt to kiss you, and if one thing annoys me more than another, it's for two women to start slobbering over each other. Hullo! Here's the doctor. Come along, doctor—we want a welcome interruption. We're getting sentimental over the baby."

The first thing the doctor saw was the suspicious redness about Joyce's eyes, and for a few seconds he found it difficult to fall in with Dinah's mood. Seeing his first quick glance, however, Dinah divined this, and rattled on in her favourite fashion to cover his sudden silence.

"We have been making all sorts of plans for the future," she told him. "Do you know, you and I have got to be godparents to the imp? I, as godmother, am going to establish him in a little cottage in Devon some time next year, for a change; so, of course, you, as godfather, will have to pay him a long visit, to see if he has learnt his catechism, and that sort of thing."

The doctor's eyes glowed as he looked out at the kopjes. "You will like that," was all he said, addressing Joyce, though scarcely looking at her.

"The little goose positively cried over it!" Dinah told him, ready to relieve his mind as to the cause of that suspicious redness.

"Well, I'm off!" she rattled on. "Given myself orders to quit. I am undergoing a course of self-education just now, which consists of new impressions, new faces, new countries." She lit a second cigarette, and waved it comprehensively across the view of the kopjes and vleis from the open French windows. "This has done its share. I've learnt quite a lot in Rhodesia. Now for fields and pastures new. I think I'll go to Paris. Extremes have such a fascination for my fickle temperament. That's why I dived out of a palatial home in Kensington, straight into a mud hut."

The doctor watched her quietly. He had not been slow to note the subtle melancholy about his chum the previous evening, in spite of his droll account of The Irresponsibles, and he wondered greatly if he had spoken and been repulsed—or only been repulsed without speaking.

"Kopjes and vleis, and Cape carts and mule wagons, and tinned foods varied occasionally with buck, and little black piccanins 'wid'out no tings on,' are things to adore for a short time, when you need only buy your ticket home directly you have had a surfeit; but, adorable or not, my impressions have led me to form the conviction that the country's chief charm for most of her supporters, is the chance for ever held out of 'something turning up,' some Aladdin's palace of gold, which will pave a luxurious 'Way Out.' That and the freedom from the home office stool are the powerful magnets that draw men continually across the ocean and over the veldt."

"Not bad reasons, either of them," suggested the doctor. "Certainly motives likely to bring out the grit in a man and prove his manhood."

"Or else the avarice! In new countries it is generally a pretty heartless fighting for the good things, and the weakest getting trampled under foot. And I could imagine that sort of thing might get hold of one, and a hardening, deteriorating process be the chief result."

"But we all try to live on each other, and mount on our neighbours everywhere," argued the doctor. "It is the law of the survival of the fittest, ingrained into animal nature. I only wonder often that men are not worse than they appear."

"I suppose the milk of human kindness saves the ship," from Dinah, while Joyce looking quietly into his strong, kind face, smiled secretly at such words coming from his lips.

"I'm surprised you are going so soon," the doctor remarked. "I thought you spoke as if you intended to stay six months."

"Did I? It was unintentional then. I shall take my passage by the East Coast in two or three weeks. When do you go?" facing him suddenly.

"I have booked a passage on the next Union Castle mail steamer. I leave Salisbury on Saturday."

"On Saturday!" Joyce echoed the words in a voice that was almost bewildered. The suddenness of the announcement seemed to take her breath away.

"I'm going a little sooner than I intended," he added, seeming not to notice her exclamation, "on account of a patient who has been badly hurt in a motor accident. They cabled to me to come if possible. It doesn't seem much use to be a month late," with a little deprecatory smile, "but there's a great deal in a fancy sometimes, and this particular patient is convinced no other doctor knows as much as I."

Joyce sat looking silently across to the far blue hills, with her hands listlessly in her lap.

Only Dinah rattled on apparently unmoved, feeling a sense of tragedy in the air, and covering it, out of her kind heart, with a curtain of frivolity.

Then she and the doctor went back together to The Knoll, and Joyce busied herself with preparing her husband's lunch.

Oswald came up at his usual hour in an irritable mood. The forage was not coming up quite as well as it ought, the boys had injured the mealie sheller, wasting an hour

of his time putting it right, and wild pig had made havoc among his vegetables overnight.

"I never knew such a life as it is becoming," he grumbled; "worry morning, noon, and night, and precious little, after all said and done, in return for one's slaving."

Joyce made no comment. She was too accustomed to his grumbling fits to notice them now. Of the two, she preferred them to his complacent, self-satisfied mood, when he always reminded her of little Jack Horner, saying, "What a good boy am I!"

She saw that the heavy lower lip looked heavier than usual, and the jaw sullen, and she knew by the way he slouched into his room to wash, kicking her little terrier out of the way, that she need not look for any further cheerful companionship that day.

"Miss Webberley has been here," she remarked, as they sat down to lunch. "Yesterday she rode to the Chaldecotts' with Captain Burnett."

"Very improper, I should say. They are not even engaged, and if they were, I don't think it would be proper to go out for a whole day together like that."

Joyce was silent.

"Don't you agree?" he asked.

"I don't see any harm in it," quietly. "I don't think anyone would."

"My mother would be horrified. She would put Miss Webberley down as extremely fast at once!"

Joyce could not help thinking how very little that was likely to disturb Dinah, but she held her peace.

"I'm not sure that she isn't," he ran on. "It's a little odd her staying up there so long without a chaperone."

"But surely a brother is chaperone enough for anyone?"

"It depends. Billy is such a frivolous feather-brain. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't give much for the brains of the three of them put together. Can't see beyond their noses, not one of them—and have no idea of taking care of the future."

"They manage to be happy in the present, though." Joyce's deep eyes were studying her plate. If only this man would let himself rejoice for just one hour a day in the sunshine of the present, how much lighter her burden might grow.

"It would be a nice thing for the women and children

if we all acted on their plan. What good would it be to you, if anything happened to me, if I had been merely happy in the present and left you penniless?"

"Still, one does not need to live thinking that one is going to die to-morrow. Life is surely hard enough without that."

"Hard!" . . . He looked up at her sternly across the table. "I wonder what you know about its hardness? You may well sympathize with Billy and Jim and Beauty. You understand so little what it means to slave day in and day out, in all weathers; and see so little result. It's a fine thing to be a woman, and just be taken care of, and have no worry at all; nothing but holidays."

A year ago Joyce might have protested, and even have been drawn into an argument. Now she only looked quietly through the open door with those deep eyes of hers, that had somehow of late grown to see so many things, grown, above all, so wise, and patient and silent.

"Miss Webberley talks of leaving in two or three weeks, and going to Paris for a time."

"Paris! . . ." with a fine sneer. "What a gad-about she is! Why in the world doesn't she settle down in one place and do some useful work? I hate this modern fashion, in which young unmarried women scour the face of the earth alone, and are not the slightest use to anyone. It is so selfish, and I hate selfishness. A woman's place is at home, not racing round the world."

"I don't think she has a home."

"Then why can't she get one? She evidently has money, and she's bright and cheerful, and all that. Plenty of men would be glad to marry her."

Joyce hid a smile as well as she could. The idea of the independent Dinah being condescendingly offered a name and protection by some man, in order to provide herself and him with a home, was almost too funny.

"I don't think she will ever marry," was all she said.

"And why in the world not? She ought to. It is her duty, instead of talking all the nonsense she does about matrimony being a failure."

Joyce gave it up then and changed the subject.

"Dr. Lawson has booked his passage by the next steamer."

"Has he? I'm sorry to hear it. I like the doctor, in spite of his extraordinary views. A pity he is so dense

about some things. He would be quite a fine man, if he were not so irreligious."

"I think he is a fine man now."

"As a doctor, perhaps. But that's always the way with these clever scientific people. They mar their attainments by some amazing views, often, I think, because it is the fashion. It would be better for him to believe in the Bible than have the most brilliant brain in the world. What use will it be to him among the damned?"

"Perhaps he won't be among the damned. Perhaps there won't be any damned," Joyce could not resist saying.

Again he looked at her sternly. "I don't know whether you are serious or not, but it is very bad taste to speak in that manner on such a subject. I hope the doctor has not been airing his views with you."

"Oh, no! He wouldn't be likely to." She got up from the table. "I think I'll call the piccanin to bring Baby in now. The sun is getting too hot for him to be out." She paused a moment, then said quietly: "I have asked Miss Webberley and Dr. Lawson to be sponsors at his christening. They are both willing. I hope you will agree."

He did not look at her, a way he had when vexed, but broke a piece of bread with lowering face.

"You know my views on the subject, and I have seen no reason to change them. I wish his relatives, Lord Lindley and Lady Penton, to be his godfather and god-mother."

"I am sorry." She spoke in the same quiet voice, but there was a new setness about the delicate lips and small, firm chin. "I do not know either of them, and it is probable I never shall; and they cannot possibly feel any special interest in Baby. Miss Webberley and Dr. Lawson have known him all his life."—she smiled a little—"and they love him, and will always love him, which matters much more than a title."

There was a moment's silence; at last he looked up.

"Do you intend to act directly against my wishes?" frigidly.

"I am sorry," with a slight faltering; "but I think Baby matters the most, and if anything happens to you and me, I should like to know he would be taken care of. Neither Miss Webberley nor Dr. Lawson would ever fail him."

He got up, pushing his chair back in an angry manner. "I would never have believed a little, quiet-eyed thing like you could be so obstinate. It is evidently useless for me to express a wish in the matter, as you have already made up your mind to ignore whatever I say."

"I am sorry," she reiterated, and then slowly left the room.

Through the long, hot afternoon she sat on the verandah, sewing beside the baby's cradle, and the thought of the doctor's approaching departure lay heavy on her heart.

How she would miss him, when there were no more cheery visits and long quiet talks. What a wonderful break his advent had made for her in that grey, monotonous, kopje-bound life! What had they not talked of sitting quietly there on the shady verandah, she with her sewing, waiting until Oswald came up to tea! She had seen, as in fleeting glimpses, how life might be fair anywhere, given but the right companion.

Would her heart ever have ached so for Devon's blue sea, or fretted so for her loved Mischief, if there had been love in her life as she now more comprehensively perceived it?

And whose was the fault, asked a vague, inner voice? What choice had she been allowed? What knowledge to aid her at the crucial time? A wave of rebellion seemed to lift her off her feet. She had been so young—so ignorant—so carelessly happy, when Providence let her bind her whole life, blindly, and throw away, probably for ever, her chance of the Great Joy that might have been. The sweet eyes gazed across to the far horizon, asking unspoken questions that filled their blue-grey depths with pain.

Was there any Providence at all that cared? Was there anything anywhere but blind chance? Did a mocking Fate hold the strings, and make merry cruelly when one of her puppets stepped blindly to destruction? Was the doctor, perhaps, with his noble, unselfish life and keen brain, enlightened by some deeper knowledge than fell to the multitude? Was her husband, with his maxims, and moralizing—his petty selfishness, and colossal self-satisfaction—merely the belated adherent of some bigoted superstition?

How should she ever know? Who could tell her?

A terrible sense of forlornness caused sudden tears to gush to her eyes, and she stood up hastily as if she would fain break away from an enshrouding dread. The quiet movement and the grate of her chair roused the sleeping infant, and a little waking cry brought her quickly on her knees beside him, with divine motherhood suffusing suddenly her delicate, beautiful face.

"My baby, my baby!" she crooned softly; "my little son, my precious man-child—while you and I have each other, what matters the clash of creeds, or strife of tongues, or the great silence that pays no heed to our passionate questions?"

The child smiled up at her with the enthralling smile of babyhood, a tiny, beautiful creature, just three months old, with his mother's deep blue eyes and fragile, porcelain-like appearance. And the face of the kneeling mother was as those Madonna-faces of divinest tenderness in the great picture galleries of the world—to the depicting of which all-conquering genius has given of its greatest and best.

CHAPTER XVII

"YOU, AND YOUR LITTLE CHILD"

"I AM coming to say good-bye to you to-morrow afternoon."

The doctor had spoken the words the previous day, and ever since, Joyce had heard them as a vague background to whatever held her thoughts.

Something in the way he had said them—some subtle inflexion of unconquerable pain—while he stood a little behind her, not seeking to meet her eyes, had seemed to inscribe them on her brain. She had made no reply. The conventional regret, the commonplace answer, suddenly showed themselves in their bald ineptitude, and she was driven to fall back on silence. It had not seemed to surprise her, and almost immediately he had strode away, leaving her gazing silently at the opposite kopjes.

They were frowning again now—frowning and inclined to mock. She felt they knew he was going away. The man who had probably saved both her life and her child's.

The man who had obliterated, for three short months, that sinister frown of theirs.

"He is going, but you will stay," they seemed to say, "bound down there in the little house on the ledge, while we hem you in on every side, and glower and taunt again if the mood takes us. You cannot get away from us. Whichever way you walk, we guard the passes still. You are our prisoner down there on the ledge." Suddenly she threw back her head and smiled with brave defiance. She was thinking of Dinah's promise. "Next year I am going, too," she said; "I and my baby-boy to beautiful Devon. He will be able to walk by then"—her eyes glowed—"and he will pick buttercups and daisies in the fields where I picked them, and the little waves will kiss his tiny feet. Ah! you may frown now!"—she shook her head laughingly with tears in her eyes—"but next year you will look for us in vain. When the dried-up grass clothes all your slopes with desolation; and the veldt fires turn them to a pall of blackness; and the dry winds hurl the dust in eddying circles across the land, I and my baby-boy will be laughing and dreaming by Devon's blue sea."

It was the hour when she was always alone in the afternoon that the doctor made his farewell visit. Generally her baby was in a cradle beside her, while she sewed, but to-day the sewing lay discarded on a chair, and the child was in her arms.

"Nothing wrong with him, I hope?" the doctor asked with a note of anxiety in his voice.

"Oh, no," smiling bravely; "he's a spoilt boy to-day, that's all."

She had scarcely acknowledged, even to herself, that it was for courage and strength she held him so.

"I can't stay very long," he said, a little painfully; "I thought I would see you first and then find your husband on the land; and then I must hurry back because Miss Webberley and The Irresponsibles are coming over for a farewell dinner."

She was silent again. What could she say that did not sound stereotyped and unreal, beside the bursting gratitude in her heart?

He talked a little on [passing subjects, and finally got up and walked down the verandah and back again. Then

he stood a little behind her chair, looking down at the small head with a whole world of unutterable love in his eyes; and though she could not see it she held her baby more tightly in her arms.

"I should be glad to feel that you will always think of me as your friend," he said gravely and gently. "You don't seem to have very many, but you can always be sure that one at least will serve you to his last breath." He braced himself up and tried to speak more naturally. "I feel as if I had rather a special right, and you a special claim, because of the unlooked-for circumstances, and the critical hours, that brought us together."

"You saved my life," huskily; "and you saved my baby for me. I shall never forget. It seems useless to talk of gratitude. My every thought of you breathes it."

He was silent a moment; and then suddenly there was a swerve in his steadfast course.

"Can I only look for gratitude!" forcing a smile that but ill disguised the depth of his feeling. "Gratitude implies an obligation, and there has been none here. Won't you call it friendship?"

Joyce clasped the child closer yet—a movement in no way lost on him—and holding him thus, gazed steadily before her. There is a beautiful painting in the Picture Gallery of the Public Gardens at Venice, where a young Madonna with a mass of curly, sun-kissed hair, and wide, deep eyes, holding her child in her arms, looks out, as it were, down the long vista of years, to the culminating tragedy of the Cross, and in her passionate joy of Motherhood is pitifully blended the anguish of a terrible foreboding. The doctor had seen the picture and been much struck by it. He saw its counterpart now, in the mysterious pain in Joyce Grant's eyes.

"Baby and I will always mingle our gratitude with gladness that it was just you, and not anyone else," she breathed.

He was silent, with compressed lips, and he dug his finger-nails into his flesh in the iron grip of his hands. He was daring himself to disturb what little peace and happiness she had—controlling, with an iron effort, a passionate impulse to bend down and kiss her hair.

"I I" Joyce stammered, trying to steady her voice and break the silence that was growing un-

bearable—"I feel it is useless to try and thank you—yet, how can I let you go, unthanked? . . ."

"If you knew the joy it has been, to be of any use at all—" and the longing in his voice would not be entirely stifled. "I want to say before I go that I am at your service always. A letter to my London address, or a cable, or anything, will find me ready instantly to do whatever you may ask. Don't be afraid to make use of me. I am a lonely man—when I allow myself time to think of it—and it would heal some of the lonesomeness to feel I was of use to you, and my little godson."

"You are very kind," she faltered. "We shall miss you dreadfully—Baby and I."

A sudden tear splashed down on the bundle in her arms, and she turned her face away. The doctor drew himself up, straight and taut, and his face grew ashen with the strain of his resolve.

"You must remember all I have said about taking care of yourself," he told her, steadying his voice with difficulty. "Don't ever get more over-tired than you can possibly help, and insist always upon good fresh food—tinned stuffs I absolutely forbid—and you *must* have some white woman here to help you. I shall speak to your husband about it again, when I say good-bye to him, and, if he will let me, I will engage some one directly I get home. Don't forget, your baby will thrive best by your keeping as bright and well as possible; but he is quite strong, and you need not be anxious. Next year"—with a sudden hoarse note—"if the gods are good, I shall see you and my godson in Devon. You will remember all I have said, and take care of yourself?" He moved forward now, and looked down into her eyes. Both were suffused with tears, that would not be controlled. She saw that it pained him inexpressibly, and tried to smile.

"I'm very silly," she murmured, "but it has been so nice having you and Miss Webberley here—and sometimes—when you are gone, Baby and I will be very lonely and homesick."

He could find nothing to say, but stood silently before her with a crushing sense of impotence.

Then he spoke, and it seemed to him he blurted out his words roughly. "If you wanted a friend you would send for me? . . . You would trust me, wouldn't you?"

... Even if it were not for some time to come, and we had not met meanwhile." His fortitude gave further—"You would trust me?"—he asked yearningly.

She looked up, and their eyes met—held together by those invisible threads of Fate against which we strive in vain. Every particle of colour had left her face, and her breath came unsteadily, when at last she lowered her gaze, and hung her head almost with a shame-faced air over the sleeping child.

No word had been spoken—but she understood—and he knew it—and knew all the rest as well.

Something like a groan escaped his lips, and then for a few brief moments he was silent.

"I must go now," he said at last, very quietly.

He leaned down, and clasped one of his hands over her little cold one, in a strong, warm clasp.

"May I take that thought away with me, Joyce?" he asked tenderly: "that, if ever you needed a friend, you would trust me, no matter how long it had been since we met?"

"Yes," in a half whisper, without looking up.

"It is more than I dared to hope." He straightened himself as if he could bear no more. "God bless you. God be good to you—you and your little child."

Then she heard his steps hurrying away down the kopje.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH BURNETT HAS HIS WAY

THE positions of The Irresponsibles were entirely typical. Jim sat on a rail, balancing himself by curling his feet round a post. Beauty lounged as low as possible in his chair, and rested his feet high above his head against another post. Billy lay on his back on the floor, with his hands under his head and his knees drawn up. They were holding a mock tribunal upon Dinah, because she had insisted upon booking her passage home, in spite of their protests.

Interested spectators were Major Egerton and Ted Burnett, who had been participators in a Sunday shoot.

"Of course," affirmed Jim, "you've no business to go back at all. Your most palpable duty is to marry one of

your heart-sick admirers, and bless Rhodesia with your presence for the rest of your natural life."

"I shouldn't call heart-sickness an entirely satisfactory marrying quality," said Dinah. "It suggests Beauty with an ineffable, languishing smile, continually adoring from the depths of the most comfortable chair he can find, with his feet far enough from the ground to obviate the necessity of some one more energetic running his errands for him."

"Slanderer!" quoth Beauty. "And have I not cooked, and washed, and sewn buttons on for you in the fullness of my heart?"

"If you sewed the buttons into the fullness of your heart, Beauty," remarked Billy, "I don't wonder you have indigestion."

"Will you tell us what sort of a mate you do want?" continued Jim, who had constituted himself spokesman. "We only await your bidding."

"I want a domesticated man," said Dinah. "I can do the riding and shooting myself, with a little bit of swearing thrown in."

"A domesticated man!" he cried. "Why, here he is on the spot, with as fine a presence thrown in as ever graced His Majesty's uniform. The Field-Marshal is domesticated to his finger tips. He is an expert jam-maker—isn't that so, Major? Didn't you take a prize for jam made by your own hands at the Agricultural Show?—which probably half killed about a dozen people afterwards."

"That's nothing," put in the Major, enjoying the joke. "Yesterday I instructed a seamstress in the art of turning sheets sides to middle."

Dinah looked mystified. "What process might that be?" she asked.

"It's what you do when you've nearly got strangled by putting your feet through the sheet in one place, and your head in another, and then turning over a few times. One morning last week I had to get up in the sheet. In fact, I nearly had to wear it all day; we were so mixed up."

"How comical!" and Dinah chuckled delightedly. "Did you strike attitudes as Julius Cæsar before the glass?"

"No, I struck the boy, because he grinned. At least, to be accurate, I tried to kick him, and all but fell backwards into the bath."

"I suppose he did his next grinning outside?"

"Undoubtedly. But I think I might consider myself qualified as a domesticated person, don't you?"

"Oh, you can't have it all your own way," put in Beauty. "I can make puddings, you know, warranted not to kill, and poultices, and cocktails. As for old Burnett there, you ought to see him cure bacon, and blow eggs, and drink champagne."

"I like the notion of the poultices best," Dinah interposed; "they'd come in so useful for black eyes."

Billy turned over on his side, and, resting his arm on his elbow and his head on his hand, looked up at her with that innocent air of his that usually preluded some remark of an exceptionally outrageous nature and said: "Seems to me, Di, you'd better take the lot. I think you'd have rather a good thing on. Why not reverse the usual order of things, and have a harem? It's a notion I've always had a particular fancy for myself."

Jim giggled so that he nearly fell off his rail, while Beauty looked lazily round his chair and said: "Billy, subside; you only hold a watching brief in this trial."

Billy subsided into a sudden accompaniment to Jim's giggles, which caused Dinah to exclaim:

"Just like a couple of little schoolboys, aren't they? They'll be hopeless now for the whole afternoon. If Jim giggles, and Billy joins in, it generally means the rest of the day wasted."

"Just think how you'll miss them!" suggested Burnett. "You won't know yourself in England with no one to scold, or spoil, or worry for."

"Perhaps not; but one can have too much of a good thing. Let me tell you what my 'spinster of no occupation' consisted in last week. Nine pairs of socks and two pairs of stockings darned. Some of the socks had to have patches put in them. Of course, they weren't worth mending, but when no one seems to have any money to buy any more——" She spread out her hands and shrugged her shoulders significantly. "Three or four woollen undergarments also to be patched, new knees into Billy's tweed knickers, and the filling up of holes Beauty had burnt with his Boer tobacco in his only respectable flannel suit."

"Did Jim ever tell you," interrupted Billy, again turning on his side and looking gravely interested, "how he once cut the seat out of a pair of old trousers of mine, and sewed it into his, and how I, not noticing, put them on,

and——” Again the irresistible pause, which made it impossible not to laugh, while Dinah threw a book at his head, exclaiming: “Billy! *will* you subside?”

“My dear Dinah,” in a hurt voice, “why jump down my throat in that fashion, when I am only trying to contribute to the general pleasantry? I was merely going to remark that I took them off again,” and Billy’s look of pained innocence was a masterpiece.

“They’re hopelessly imbecile,” Dinah asserted, as she got up to go for a stroll and gather roses, whither the Major followed her. This was not by any means his first Sunday spent at The Knoll. He had come out many times since the Government House Reception, and he had not attempted to hide the fact that Dinah was the chief attraction. It would not have been natural to Guy Egerton to do so. What people said was ever of so small moment to him. He was emphatically the type of man whom many may influence in small things, but who is resolute to a degree in big ones. If he wanted a thing, and had quite made up his mind about it, he would, as he himself expressed it, “go for it bald-headed,” which doubtless accounted for his splendid fighting record.

Not that he was actually in love with Dinah yet, but she amused and entertained him, and they were the best of friends.

As they gathered roses now they chattered on lightly, each drawing the other in a manner that made either shine, which had perhaps a good deal to do with their mutual liking.

“You mustn’t go home and run Rhodesia down,” he said to her, as they strolled back with their nosegay. “Taking it all round, you know, it’s a tip-top country.”

“Fly-bitten, flea-bitten, sand-choked wilderness!” asserted Dinah, out of a spirit of contradiction. “I’ve never seen so many fleas in all my life before as one may see in an hour out here. As for the sand, it is everywhere. You eat it, drink it, and lie down in it.”

“Not so very much worse than the mud and fog in England. Who wants to live in a country where June is colder than Lapland; and there are no servants to be had?”

“There are only a fairly intelligent species of baboon here,” she declared. “I’m certain I’ve grown grey with trying to hammer a little common sense into Saucepan.”

"But there are most excellent boys to be had. My present personal boy valets me as well as any white man I ever had, and some of them are good cooks."

"But they don't come outside to the farms, and the inside doesn't matter as far as I am concerned," she told him as they joined the others.

"I always think the inside matters the most," commented Beauty languidly. "Wash me or not, as you please, but give me food."

"You are as bad as the Saint," she exclaimed; "you really might form a Dirty Dick's Club here."

"Don't disparage the only Saint our locality boasts," from Jim. "St. Oswald entirely believes that cleanliness is next to godliness; but then he is so taken up with the godliness there is no time for any 'next.' He certainly has a bath on Saturdays. I will vouch for him there."

"Is that Grant, at Killarney, you are speaking of?" asked the Major. "What has become of his pretty little wife? I once saw her in town, and I've never seen her since."

"She is married to an antique some one dug up about thirty-six years ago," replied Dinah, a trifle bitterly; "and he likes to see a woman in her proper place, which, in his opinion, is where the patriarchs liked to see her about 900 B.C."

"Sensible man," quoth Billy from the floor. "Good old times those; always thought I should have liked Solomon's billet myself!"

He sat up and stretched himself, avoiding the cushion Dinah aimed at his head.

"What do you say to another kopje, Major? I've a presentiment there are two or three buck in that little round-topped one on the left."

There was a general movement, and collecting of guns, and they once more sallied forth, alert enough now it meant killing, in search of buck, or birds, or whatever wild animal might chance across their path.

Dinah accompanied them, carrying a rifle, and Burnett walked beside her, though she made an attempt to annex herself to Jim or Billy, and frustrate his intention.

She hardly knew why she did this, except that ever since their ride to the Chaldecotts' there had been a subtle sense of change in their relationship, and she had never swerved from her resolve under the stars to keep him from

speaking of his regard if she could. She knew instinctively that, in spite of himself, he had gone deeper into the maze, and because she was still unbending in her decision, she wanted to arrest his steps and help him out of it again.

Only the little god is a wayward, capricious imp, and she might very well have saved herself the trouble.

Now, however, finding her attempt to escape him vain, she summoned all her lightness to her aid and chattered brilliantly about anything and everything, which left no room for gravity, or the least touch of sentiment. Only in the end to feel a growing conviction that he meant to have his way and would not be hindered. She took secret glances at the strong, grave face, laughing pleasantly enough at her sallies, while never lessening its expression of firm resolve. He spoke little himself, as ever, yet, likewise, as ever, his silence was full of appreciation and sympathetic interest. Dinah was conscious, had been dimly so for some weeks, that she was at her best with Burnett. The action of his personality upon hers was to add a daintier and still a deeper touch to her banter. If she let herself go, this merged into a quiet understanding and probable seriousness that was dangerously enthralling and frightened her. It even crossed her mind once, if only he had not this infatuation for a colonial life, this love of the kopjes and vleis, how good it might have been just to let herself go, and swim out into the sunlit river of love. But she tried to crush the thought instantly, feeling that half a world separated them: a wide rolling ocean which neither could cross. The idea of his relinquishing his present life for love of her did not find any room in her thoughts. It was impossible. What could he do instead, now that he had left the army, and lost touch more or less with England? In any case, England would certainly weary and fret him after a year, and she would feel that she was a stumbling-block, holding him out of his natural path.

Therefore, was her thought, he must not speak. It was better for both of them to part the good friends they were, unembarrassed by any closer sentiment.

But Ted Burnett thought otherwise, and he was a man accustomed to act for himself, and not be guided by another's views. As Dinah vaguely suspected, he was merely biding his time, not in the least deterred by her seeming indifference, because some vague instinct whispered to him that half of it was feigned. And presently she

felt this, so that the chatter died away on her lips, and as they turned their steps homewards a silence fell upon them.

"So you are really going," he said at last, making no effort to conceal the regret in his voice. "Do you know, I am beginning to almost wish you had never come."

She tried to answer lightly.

"That is too bad, after my efforts to be nice to you all, and bring you a little variation."

"I don't think it required very great efforts," with his quiet smile. "I expect you are always nicest when you are just yourself."

"Don't!" she cried, holding up her hand in mock protest. "Nothing hurts me more than to be politely eulogized. I know I'm very nice sometimes. I haven't any delusions about it whatever, and I am much too honest to pretend otherwise. But I also know that I am a moody, unconventional, often unintelligible crank. Make a sum of the two and subtract one from the other, and you have a passable individuality, with a leaning to the eccentric. That is the most I will allow of myself."

Again he smiled quietly, looking into her eyes, and her gaze fell before his.

"If only the crank would love Rhodesia, and be happy making her home there at intervals?" He spoke questioningly, still looking into her eyes.

She gathered up her courage and returned the look.

"Your crank would prove the rift in the lute," she told him, "which spoilt the whole music. Be a wise man, Captain Burnett. I am going to help you to be one, and keep your music, and your milk and honey, and your radiant, untainted sunshine, and let the crank fade quickly out of your mind."

"She will never do that; I would even choose to be unwise."

They walked on in silence, and almost for the first time in her life Dinah found herself utterly at a loss for words. She had under-reckoned his determination and his power.

"I know you don't want me to speak," he told her presently; "but it is just because I feel the crank will be always there that I will not be prevented. The turn of Fortune's Wheel brings many startling surprises. It may chance even yet, that, tired of your wandering, and finding no desirable rest for the sole of your feet, your mind will turn finally to this quiet, happy sunny life."

"No," emphatically, "no, no."

But he would not be daunted. "Will you tell me one thing?" he asked. "If I had not, so to speak, planted myself here—if I were back again in the world, as you and I mean the world—would you still try so hard to prevent my telling you that I love you?"

She tried to frame an affirmative, but the word died away on her lips, and she said nothing.

He moved a little nearer and possessed himself of one of her hands, the strong, shapely hands he had always admired so much.

"Give me that much hope," he pleaded; "say it might have been different."

"What is the use? What good will it do either of us?" and she tried to withdraw her hand.

"That is virtually an admission," and he held the hand tighter. "If I were to give it up and return to England, would you listen to me?"

"No." She spoke a little sadly. "Love may flourish on some kinds of sacrifice, but not that kind. I know you would never openly regret, nor allow it to be seen, but it is just the things we should both leave unsaid that would break us. Our marriage tie would become a fetter, and we should be helpless to prevent it. It always seems to me that the tie which has become a fetter is the most hopelessly unendurable thing in the world. I feel I would rather die a thousand deaths than risk it."

He walked along silently beside her, and in the dim light she could see he was very white, and his lips a little rigid.

"Your freedom would always be yours if you asked for it," he said at last. "I do not consider any man is justified in keeping a woman to her vow if she wishes to be freed. Only a coward would do so. A man should hide his own hurt and stand aside."

But she only shook her head. "It is too risky. Oh! you don't know how I love my freedom! It is such a dear old world, and there is such lots to do and see while you are untrammelled. Your love and companionship would make me happy for a time—I know it would—and then there would come a day when I should dream of the almond blossom against the blue sea in Japan, or the blue gentian in Austria, or the Isles of Greece with their fascinating old-world ruins, or the snow-capped Hima-

layas, and a restless fever to be away would fret my blood and make me an unendurable companion. Why should I, knowing myself so well, inflict my unsatisfactoriness upon a man I like beyond others?" She tried to laugh lightly. "If I disliked you, or had a grudge against you, I might punish you by listening. As it is, I only beg you to stop."

For answer he only seized the other hand too, and held both firmly in his.

"I have learnt more than I hoped," he said. "What was the veriest guess-work before is assuming the guise of a probability; you dear woman, I would far rather you went away now because you liked me, than stayed on indifferent. I can wait. Most of the things worth having need to be waited for. If you never come back I shall at least have known you, and loved you, and that is not a small thing."

There was a suspicious glisten in her eyes, which she hastily sought to hide.

"You would be wiser to forget at once," she insisted. "It is what I mean to do. It is the only way with a dream that cannot be fulfilled. Sensible people stuff their minds with anything else they can lay hold of, and crowd out the Forbidden Canaan. Only the foolish and the sentimentalists stay on the mountain-top, gazing at it. I shall not come back to Rhodesia. Having seen it once, fascinating as it is, I feel it is finished with. There is nothing that appeals like the older civilization, and the cities laden with treasures of art. I like unbeaten ways, or records of extinct dynasties, or haunts of wild animals, but your kopjes, and veldt, and corrugated-iron sheds, and everlasting bungalows, and detestable air of newness and beginning, frets me after a little, and I am in haste to be gone. I have been gloriously happy at The Knoll, with those three dear babes of men; but I know it would not last, and I have a prejudice for leaving a place while I am still enjoying it."

He looked away wistfully across the familiar hills, feeling there was nothing further to say, and sad enough at heart in spite of his hopefulness.

"If you don't mind making excuses for me," he said, "I think I won't come back this evening."

Dinah was silent, feeling suddenly that the blow had fallen upon him harder than she had expected. Some-

thing in his voice told her this quiet, strong-faced man possessed infinite depths of feeling, and to the very bottom of those depths she had moved him.

"I love you absolutely," he finished. "I won't speak of it again, as long as I feel it troubles you, but I want you to know it, wherever you are. Good night!" And with the lights of the house close beside them, he left her and turned his face homewards.

CHAPTER XIX

"THE LADIES' BISLEY"

ON the verandah she found Beauty seated alone, smoking a solitary pipe. Major Egerton had gone, and Jim and Billy were busy superintending the skinning of two duyker they had shot, somewhere round by the kitchen hut. As she slowly approached, Beauty got up and came to meet her, and she knew he was scanning her face closely.

"Come and sit by the mimosa," he said, and led the way to a seat a short distance from the house. She followed mechanically, feeling unaccountably tired and depressed.

"So you have sent him away," he remarked thoughtfully. "Poor old Burnett! He's pretty hard hit."

"How do you know I have sent him away?"

"I know it because I know you, Dinah. And because I know Burnett."

"It was the only thing to do," half to herself, and half to the night. "I tried hard to prevent him speaking."

Beauty pulled silently at his pipe. It was soothing to sit quite still with anyone so understanding as he invariably showed himself, and Dinah was grateful to him. At last:

"I wonder if you know how much you care for him, Dinah? I've thought several times lately that you don't."

"Why do you think I care at all?"

He smiled into the darkness. "I'm a lover myself; and it opens one's eyes considerably. It is almost the only thing that does open one's eyes. The densest people of all are the people who have never been in love."

"But it's so terrible," she reasoned. "As I said before, I am afraid of it. I perceive that there might be no sunshine and no joyousness; no longer any charm in far-away lands, nor any beauty near at hand, if the loved one were absent—nothing but emptiness."

"But only for a time," he urged. "Sooner or later comes the birth of the new richness and fullness and understanding—whatever the pain—which can be gained in no other way. After all the great art of Life is to live, isn't it? Even if it hurts. . . . And there's no doubt, to *live* in the best sense, one has to go through some sort of furnace. You wouldn't be a shirker, Dinah? It is unthinkable of you."

"I hope not, but my furnace must be my own. I won't, if I can help it, drag another through with me. I have given him his chance to forget, because I so dread disaster for both of us. I am going to try and forget, myself, while there is yet time."

They sat on a little longer, mostly in silence, and then Billy was heard calling them to supper.

As they stood up to go, Beauty paused a moment, looking into her face in the starlight.

"Do you know, Dinah," he said, "I hope you won't be able to forget. I hope all your efforts will be in vain. If I have ever seen one man more likely to make you happy than any other I think it is Ted Burnett."

But she only shook her head and answered resolutely: "It's no use hoping, Beauty. My mind is quite made up. After I leave here it is not in the least likely that I shall ever see him again. I shall go out of my way to avoid him."

Neither mentioned the subject again, and Burnett came no more to The Knoll; but as the doctor had already gone, and Dinah started in a few days, his absence was not remarkable.

"My very last appearance in public in Salisbury," she announced the following morning, "will be at the Ladies' Bisley. I shall there say good-bye to my Rhodesian friends, and then I shall pack up my best clothes."

"Are we not worthy of the best?" asked Beauty, struggling with a tinned haddock.

"I thought you loved me in anything," flashing a glance at him.

"I do; but there are degrees even in love. For in-

stance, in your Worth costume and Parisian hat, I find my pulse beats one degree faster than when you are garbed in faded serge and your hair is out of curl."

Jim was carving a ham by cutting chunks off it, because it was a quicker method than slicing; and having succeeded in hopelessly disfiguring it, he remarked:

"That should prove to you at once how immeasurably is my devotion above his. I adore you in anything; even flannelette and curl papers."

"You libeller! I was never seen in either in my life. What a glorious mess you've made of that ham! Billy, why do you let him maul the food about so?"

"My dear Dinah, a glance from you goes further than an oath from me. Though why, I can't imagine, with such a squint!"

"I don't squint. How dare you say such a thing? If you love me, Beauty, hit him over the left eye with the treacle spoon."

Billy rested one hand lightly on Beauty's arm. "Keep calm," he said gravely; "nothing ever matters so much as keeping calm."

"The question is," continued Dinah, reverting to her first topic, "who shall I shoot with in the mixed doubles?"

"You speak as if you had the pick of Salisbury. Really, Dinah, your colossal vanity . . .!" and Billy raised his shoulders significantly.

"I have," she retaliated. "There is . . ."

"You have not," he interrupted; "I wouldn't shoot with you if you were the only woman in Africa. I know perfectly well that if your partner misses making a bull, you'll hit him over the head with the butt end of your rifle."

"Undoubtedly," with a laugh; "but you needn't go and tell everyone."

"I protest that it should be a toss up between Beauty and myself," declared Jim; "we've fetched and carried for you all these weeks out here, and we ought to share your final triumph."

"So it is; but I have also a hankering after the Field-Marshal. I love his twinkle so."

"You had better let the Field-Marshal alone," said Billy, "if you don't want to be torn up by the other women."

"But how shall I decide anyway? I want to shoot

with Beauty, because he would look so ravishing lying on the mound; and with Jim, because of his 'heagle' eye, and with the Field-Marshal, because . . . "

"Well . . . ?"

"Because he wears such nice boots."

"Don't be such a crass idiot," from Billy; "if you want to win, shoot with Jim, and then you'll only get second. Mrs. Adair and I will get first."

"A sovereign you don't," put in Jim.

"Haven't got such a thing—and don't ever anticipate having one; but I'll lay you my Salisbury boots."

"They don't fit. Make it the Salisbury shirt, and buy Beauty out of his share of it if I win."

"How in the world am I going to get you all three respectably dressed to appear together!" exclaimed Dinah in sudden alarm. "How are two pairs of good boots, one good shirt, two good ties, one good hat, and one decent pair of riding breeches to be divided between three men?"

"Well, the man who has the shirt can't have the breeches," pronounced the irrepressible Billy; "and the man who has the breeches can't have the hat. It looks as if one would have to go in a pair of riding breeches, one in a shirt, and the other in a hat and boots."

"I'm right off the hat and boots," said Beauty, in a way which started Jim and Billy giggling hopelessly.

"It's not a fancy dress affair by any chance," suggested Jim at length. "I don't mind going swathed in 'limbo,' as Cæsar's Ghost."

"And I might wear a skin or two, and carry locusts and wild honey," added Billy; "while Beauty wouldn't need anything else than a halo and his 'seraphic' smile as the Archangel Gabriel."

"A Fancy Dress Rifle Shoot!" scornfully. "Really you are the veriest lunatics. If you want to go in the garb you are best suited to, it ought to be swaddling clothes."

"Well, that's exactly what I suggested," from Jim, in a hurt voice; "I don't care whether you call it Cæsar's Ghost or Baby Bunting."

"The most sensible proceeding will be to find out how much money anyone has got. The entrance fees will come to sixteen shillings between us."

"Well, that settles it," and Billy pushed his chair

away from the table with an air of finality, "because I know there's only one pound in the coffer, which leaves a paltry four shillings over for clothes. We shall be obliged to go across to the Borrowdale store, and see if we can get two shilling shirts, and two shilling pairs of trousers, and a hat thrown in for luck. We might take over some mealies and trade them for any other things we need."

"Why don't you make money?" cried Dinah. "What in the world is the good of sitting down on a farm like three mangel-wurzels, and just growing?"

"But if we've got to bother about making money," reasoned Jim, "we might just as well be in England. We came out here because we thought we shouldn't need any clothes, and so shouldn't have to work."

"I came because I thought I shouldn't have to wash," said Billy.

"Poor Rhodesia!" groaned Dinah.

"Tell you what, you chaps!" broke in Jim, "we might borrow Saucepan's Sunday clothes, and toss who shall wear them. I saw him last Sunday in an old swallow-tail coat, and a pair of duck trousers, a pink shirt and a kind of sky-blue felt hat. Say, Dinah, will you take me in that rig, as your own extra-special Dandy-coloured coon?"

"No, I *won't*! But I'll tell you what I will do. I'll get ready to ride to town with one of you this very moment, and bring back all the garments needed. Come along, Billy. We promised to lunch with Mrs. Adair at The Residency before I left. We'll go this very day."

She got up promptly and turned to the door, while Billy shrugged his shoulders and looked victimized.

"Don't be an ass, Billy, and pretend you don't want to go," she added. "You've never got even with Mrs. Adair yet since she floored you so at the Hetheringtons'. You know perfectly well you are dying to lunch there to-day."

"If I could only go as I am! . . ." looking wistfully down at blue copper-riveted dungarees and hob-nailed shooting boots. "I've blessed Chaldecott's very name ever since he introduced the wearing of these things."

"People might think you worked if you did, and that would be a pity—with such a reputation as yours."

"Sarcasm misplaced, my dear Dinah, is a sign of weak intellect," he retorted. "When we are all trying so hard

to love and admire you, why so persistently raise obstacles?"

"Go and get ready, and don't chow so," she called, as she disappeared. Half an hour later, they cantered away together—a goodly pair without doubt, with their most pleasing trait still that unswerving, unfathomable devotion to each other.

The result of their shopping expedition was a trio on the following Saturday, which, as Dinah pointed out to the Field-Marshal, did her real credit.

"People talk of the trouble babies are," she told him, "but for a real right-down propensity to turn a woman's hair grey, and drive her into an early grave, give me three grown men, who need the care of half a dozen babies."

The Field-Marshal laughed genially. The first few minutes at the Range had quickly brought him to her side, and he answered rather pointedly: "If there's a vacancy at any time, I should rather like to be the new baby."

"Well, I hope you haven't Billy's distaste for washing, that's all! He says he came to Rhodesia because he thought he need never wash here. He says he was told no one ever did, and he's got quite a grievance about it."

"He's changed his mind, has he? He thinks we do wash sometimes! Sundays and holidays, for instance? Who are you shooting with?" he added. "Why didn't you ask me to shoot with you?"

"I wanted to"—archly—"but I was advised not, if I wanted to win!"

He thoroughly enjoyed her frankness. "Very sound advice, too! Who have you chosen instead?"

"She's putting up with me," said Jim, joining them at the moment. "As a very great honour I was asked fifth."

"Fibber!"—expressively. "When do we shoot?"

"Now; your mound is waiting."

They hurried off, stopping, however, to lay a wager with Billy and Mrs. Adair as they passed them.

"You must keep my husband away if you want to win," Mrs. Adair told Billy; "I always find if one thing is more conducive to bad shooting than another it's husbands."

"I know," echoed Dinah, "though I'm not burdened with one. He suggests you aim at the target, doesn't he?"

—and advises you to lie easily, where lumps like cannon-balls are running into your waist-band ; and not to be in a hurry, just after you've pulled the trigger ; and just when you're right on the bull he worries about your feet being uncovered ; and when the red flag waves and you're nearly crying with vexation, he remarks in a hurt voice, ' If you'd only do as I tell you.' My only wonder is some of these rifle shoots don't end in a general massacre of husbands."

" We'll take the bet," chimed in Jim ; " I see Colonel Adair looking round for Mrs. Adair, so we're safe to win, Dinah. Come along."

Billy and his partner took their places at the same time, and the sensation of the afternoon was a double tie, after which Dinah and Jim won by one point.

" I'm very glad," Mrs. Adair said graciously. " It is always nice for visitors to win, but I tried very hard to beat you all the same."

" If Billy hadn't muffed it you probably would have done, for my hand was getting shaky. I shall insist upon his paying up, and put the sovereign into the Respectability Fund."

" What in the world is that ? " asked Colonel Adair. " Are outside subscribers invited ? "

" No, certainly not. They would work less than ever if they could get some one else to clothe them. It's only the necessity to be decently clothed at intervals, that makes them keep the farm going at all. As far as Rhodesia is concerned, I should stamp them Undesirables of the first water."

" Shut up, Dinah," chimed in Billy. " We made twenty-five and ninepence last month, and there was eight and sixpence owing for a bag of mealies."

" There is a lot more owing," added Beauty, " only we all forgot to put it down, and can't remember who owes it."

" Do you really get as far as keeping books ? " Mrs. Adair questioned.

" We try to, but Billy started writing love-letters on the pages of one, and Jim has used up most of the other lighting cigarettes."

" You all make such a fuss about work," grumbled Billy ; " why should we work ? it's so commonplace. Anyone can work. It's much more original to sit in the sun and think. How do you do, Mrs. Chaldecott ? " as she strolled up to the group. " I was just saying how

foolish it is to work. I'm sure your husband would agree with me. Was he too lazy to come to-day, or couldn't you get him out of his dungarees?"

"He was too busy. You know he works very hard indeed."

"Building huts!" from Jim. "I'm quite sure he's never happier than when he's blotting out the landscape with huts, of various designs, all looking as if they were trying to stand on one leg."

So they chatted on until a general move was made, and then a chorus of regrets greeted the announcement that this was Dinah's very last appearance in public.

She thanked them all warmly; said she felt she had learnt quite as much as was good for her about colonial farm life, and come to the end of all her patience, so, for the sake of every one's peace of mind she was going to visit the Sphinx in the desert, and try and imbibe a little more.

Major Egerton walked with her to where the others were getting the mule-cart ready, expressing his regret with unmistakable warmth.

"But I shall reach England myself," he finished, "in about two months, and then I hope you will take pity on a lonely bachelor in London."

"As long as you don't require the care and attention of an 'Irresponsible,'" as she clambered into the ungainly vehicle; "I have done with their type for a year at least."

CHAPTER XX

THE DEPARTURE OF DINAH

So Dinah came to her last evening, and there was a general atmosphere of depression among the three colonists who had so entirely appreciated her visit. In the afternoon she had paid her farewell visit to Joyce and her small godson, and speaking of it now she urged them to go and see her often.

"But there's no escaping the Saint," murmured Jim, "and I'm so horribly afraid of him."

"So am I," agreed Beauty; "if one could be sure of a chat with Mrs. Grant alone."

"She's always alone in the afternoon, except for the

baby, and you've no idea what a perfect infant he's growing. I thought him appalling at first, but he's like a Cherubim or Seraphim now. Don't air that old chestnut about 'continually do cry,'" she hastened to add, addressing Billy; "I can see it on the tip of your tongue, and your jokes of late have been appalling. You must be suppressed."

"I always am when you are anywhere round. The wonder is I dare speak at all."

"We all love the baby, and we all love the baby's mother," said Jim; "but the baby's father makes you feel as if eternal damnation were staring you in the face, and the devil, with a three-pronged fork, lurking round the corner lying in wait for you. My nerves are really not equal to the strain."

"If he'd only see a joke," murmured Beauty. "I told him a beauty yesterday, and his fatuous reply nearly gave me heart failure."

"Never mind the heart failure, let's have the joke," said Billy, who was busy cleaning a pipe that Dinah protested wanted disinfecting.

"As a matter of fact, it was a true story," Beauty continued, "about two Buluwayo prospectors. They were going off on a new prospecting trip, and resolved to go minus the usual case of whisky."

"I don't believe it," put in Jim. "The history of Rhodesia contains no such instance."

"It is quite true. A friend of mine——"

"Of course," from Billy, "I often have the same sort of friend myself."

"Anyhow, one chap said, 'Let's take one bottle in case of snake-bites.' The other agreed. When they had got a mile out of town, the second chap said: 'Blimey, Bill, I'm snake-bit already!' St. Oswald never smiled," he added, as Jim clapped him on the back and told him it wasn't bad. "He only remarked, 'I don't see much point in it. Stories about whisky are usually very weak!'"

"Pathetic, isn't it?" groaned Billy.

"It's enough to drive Joyce crazy," was Dinah's comment. "I think you had better elope with her, Billy. I'd love her for a sister-in-law."

"I'd do it like a shot if we could live on love. Perhaps he'll die soon. Don't good people generally die young? I'm always expecting to be taken myself."

"I shouldn't worry ; no doubt, as I have said before, you and St. Oswald are where the gods draw the line. They can't have any riff-raff, however good."

"I've a great mind to pull you all round the garden by your hair," he told her ; "but I'm afraid of demoralizing Saucepan and Bucket."

He got up and stretched himself lazily. "Come for a stroll, anyway ; to-morrow I shall be weeping over a desolate hearthstone."

He put his arm through hers and they moved away into the shadows.

"Saul and Jonathan," quoth Jim, with feigned lightness, "only better."

Beauty sank deeper into his chair and blew clouds of smoke to the stars. "Much better," he agreed, and drifted into a brown study, seeing only a small white face, with wise, sad eyes, and brown, glossy hair, which bred an eternal hunger in his heart.

And away under the starlight Billy and Dinah strolled arm in arm, saying few words, offering no caress, yet sublimely aware that still, as ever of old, each was all the world to the other.

What a record it had been, this devotion of theirs from the very cradle. Their old nurse loved to tell how long before either could speak, it was useless to try and deal with them apart. What one baby had, the other must have also, or the roof was nearly screamed down by both at once. And if Billy was punished, Dinah would sit under the table and refuse to have anything to do with anyone, much less touch food, until he was forgiven.

And if it was Dinah in disgrace, Billy would eschew all games and mope in silence likewise.

And so it had gone on through childhood and the youthful days, till as man and woman, each was still at heart the other's world.

When Billy lost nearly all his money in an unfortunate speculation Dinah had instantly sent him a cheque for the half of all she possessed. Needless to say it was returned, and she had had to content herself since lavishing him with gifts.

"I thought you'd have stayed, Di," he said now, rather sadly.

"Stayed ? Little Billee—how ?" in surprise.

"With Burnett. He's one of the very best."

It was the first time he had alluded to him in that light at all, and Dinah wondered.

"How did you know?"

"Oh, I guessed, and he dropped a hint. He's not the sort of chap who's ashamed of caring for a woman, just because she may not care for him. I only wish you did care. He'd make such a thundering good husband."

"I care enough to spare him. If he could foresee what I foresee, he would be almost ready to go down on his knees and thank me."

"I don't believe it, but, of course, it's no use saying anything; you know your own mind best. But just let me say one thing, Di, before you go. If you change your mind, and want him, don't be a silly fool and let a rotten pride spoil your life. Come right back here and take your chance. More lives are wrecked by silly pride, which is really vanity, than anything else. If I'm not very much mistaken, Ted Burnett will be waiting for you; but, in any case, if it's your chance for happiness, don't be afraid. You can easily go away again if you see he has changed, but you could never undo the loss, if you let yourself persuade yourself to stay away for fear he had changed, when all the time he was waiting."

"But he mustn't wait. That is just the point. I want him to get fond of some one else, and be happy with her. It would be so much wiser, Billy. As long as you're in the land of the living, I really don't want a husband. You know I don't. You are worth a dozen better-halves."

"Silly kid!" and there was that in his voice which made the words sound more like a caress than many an impassioned phrase.

"All the same, Di, you must marry some day. You can't go on roving for ever, and you'll never care to stay here with me. I think I rather want to see you settled. What ripping sport to see little duplicates of ourselves."

But she would only laugh at him. "Duplicates are nothing to the real, signed, artist's proof. You'd be horribly disappointed. Give it up, Little Billee. Di is going to be an old maid, in blue spectacles and mittens, knitting socks, and lecturing small Billys, in assorted sizes, on their rowdy ways; impressing upon them that she was the very goodest little girl that ever lived herself."

He could not help smiling at the picture she conjured

up, but he let her change the subject and said no more of Burnett and his hopes.

He knew well enough she would go her own way in spite of everyone, and in his eyes she could do no wrong.

Yet the next day when they all three hung round her on the station, saying good-bye, an outsider might have remarked that he was the only one who seemed unconcerned with her departure. Up to the last moment, while Beauty and Jim condoled with themselves, and each other, and busied about her comfort, he sauntered round with his hands in his pockets, teasing her about her luggage and her packages, and offering fatuous advice upon every unlikely subject connected with train and steamer travelling.

"Good-bye," said Beauty, holding her outstretched hand a moment, and looking into her eyes with his most winsome smile. "Give my best love to the Henley Regatta Course, and tell Darell I'm coming home to take the 'Diamonds' from him next year. And bless you for the best trump-card in the pack."

"Good luck," was Jim's parting salutation. "I don't know whether there are ever tears in a voice outside a book, but imagine them in mine, welling up from a heart almost too full to speak, and tell dear old England a manly heart in a swelling bosom still lives only to serve her."

"Excellent!" cried Dinah. "Surely the world is losing a great novelist! You ought to carry a notebook about and dot down such gems. If you could only inscribe Beauty's smile beside it! I don't mind telling you, now I'm just off, I've been head over ears in love with you both for weeks."

The train creaked, just on the move.

"Silly kid!" said Billy. "Hurry up and come back."

CHAPTER XXI

LONDON AGAIN

DINAH stood on the island in the middle of Piccadilly Circus and watched the traffic. She had arrived from Egypt the previous day. On her way home from Rhodesia she had left the German East African ship at Suez, and journeyed by train to Cairo, doing the usual Egyptian sight-seeing, and making her travels last ten months in all.

Ten months in the little-populated places. Ten months among the silent spaces. Ten months away from the beloved island-home.

Dinah stood quite still watching the traffic, and felt as if she were drinking champagne. She drew a long breath.

"Oh! how I love People," she breathed; "lots and lots of humans; all more or less sinners like myself—smiling, hurrying, jostling, sorrowing. London!—if I were not afraid of getting myself incarcerated in a lunatic asylum, I would kneel down and kiss your very paving-stones!"

Dinah was rather given to mental apostrophizing. When she had stood a few minutes looking at the Sphinxes, as they gazed over her head across the wide desert into the distant Infinities—stonily, loftily, indifferent—she had finally remarked: "You needn't give yourselves such airs with me. I'm alive in the Present, do you hear? alive to my very finger tips—and I wouldn't give one hour of it for all your dead ages."

Later, beside the Pyramids, she laughed, utterly refusing to be impressed: "Fancy building a useless, ridiculous pile like that!" was her summing up, "and leaving it to us to dam the Nile! But if it was those silly little people who were always striking foolish attitudes, sideways, I'm not in the least surprised."

The Desert, however, made her breathe a little fitfully.

"It's not that I like empty spaces," she said; "I prefer tearing life, but this is something rather apart, isn't it? I do so love lots of room to breathe, and far-away horizons."

When she journeyed on a camel, she wailed incessantly: "I have done nothing to deserve it," was her moan. "I feel like Rachel weeping for her children; but my children are my aching bones."

When she reached Victoria Station, she selected, leisurely, a hansom with a smiling driver, and well-fed horse, having all heavy luggage placed on a four-wheeler to follow. Before she entered, she flashed up at the cabby her brilliant smile: "Kensington Palace Gardens," she said, "and please drive through all the most crowded places."

At her destination she paid him three times as much as she need have done, and, in answer to the man's pleased glance of interrogation, informed him: "It's all right. I've been wandering about in deserts and places, and I'm so glad to see you all again; I feel as if I want to walk about

shaking hands broadcast. Give Pegasus," glancing at the horse, "an extra good feed to-night, with my love."

The man drove off, thinking she wasn't much to look at, but she was a right down good sort all the same; while Dinah was rapturously embraced by a very young-looking aunt, and two wildly excited young cousins, who clamoured eagerly to know why they hadn't been allowed to come and meet her with the carriage.

"Because I wanted my first draught of London from a hansom," she told them; "I wanted the *real* thing—no expensive, highly-flavoured substitute. I've dreamt of hansoms, and policemen, and 'buses and things till I felt they were all uncles and cousins and aunts. To-morrow I'm going to wander about alone, feasting my eyes on everything."

That was why she stood on the island in Piccadilly, watching the traffic.

And then it was that she remembered the Silence of Rhodesia. She looked for one long minute up Regent Street without seeing anything at all, and above the uproar and the rush—as it were in a higher layer of ether—she heard that silence of the kopjes, and vleis, and veldt—which is as a mysterious personality, possessing sound—a silence one can *hear*.

Next with that graceful, swinging stride, for which she was so often admired, she headed for Trafalgar Square, and Whitehall, and stately, beloved Westminster, winding up in the afternoon with a "taxi" to Brook Street, to have tea with the doctor. He was not able to see her immediately, and she wandered curiously round his den, whither he had sent the page-boy to take her.

How like him it all looked. So comfortable and sensible and reassuring, with just that touch of sadness about its solitude which was so alluring in him. She sat down in the big, cosy arm-chair with its book-rest, near the fire.

"He thinks his big thoughts here," she mused; "and makes his unobtrusive plans to heal a world. I wonder when and where Joyce comes in?"

Her eyes roved round the room, and a glimpse of something on the writing-desk made her get up for a closer inspection. She had discerned, as a marker in a book, an odd little woolly tassel.

She picked the book up and opened it, and touched the commonplace little woollen string tenderly. "That was

once on the woolly shoes I made my godson. One does not need to be told that when he reads his book, he holds his marker in his hand. I wonder how he managed to pull it off." There was a momentary sadness in her face as she glanced again to the chair. "I suppose they are both there with him nightly. When the day's labour is ended, and his work of healing done until the morrow, and all the world shut out for a few restful hours, Joyce's beautiful face fills his solitude. It is rather wonderful. This brilliant, clever brain—this notable young specialist, with all his benefits to mankind, solitary on the heights of Olympus, and that little girl among the kopjes with her baby-boy, all his heaven and all his earth. Heigho! Dinah Webberley, when you let yourself get sentimental you drivel—so dry up."

She sat down again in his big chair, and waited until the door opened, and the doctor himself stood before her.

"I needn't say I'm glad to see you," he began; "besides, I'm more glad than I can say."

"That's nice of you; but, then, you were always nice. It's real good to be sitting here."

"When did you reach England?" drawing up a second arm-chair, and ringing the bell for tea.

"Yesterday. I've been playing about among the traffic to-day, wallowing in my native mud, so to speak. Heavens! how I love London!"

He looked at her quizzically. "I suppose that's why you came back?"

"Wasn't I sure to come back?"

"Not alone. I hoped you might come back accompanied—to buy a trousseau," he added as an after-thought.

"*Et tu, Brute!*" throwing up her hands. "Now listen to me, Dr. Cecil Lawson. I adjure you, as a down-right good pal, do not join the ranks of those who seek to lure me towards matrimony."

He smiled into the fire, and she continued, a trifle ambiguously: "He's your pal, too—how could you wish him the misfortune to be fettered to a restless being like myself. Matrimony's a pretty tough job, anyhow. Give him the chance of winning the placid, gentle, soothing type of woman a man loves best."

"Not all men."

"Yes," resolutely; "*all* men, when they choose in moments of insight, instead of flashlight moments of attraction. Just as if the average man's digestion and bank-book and leaning to obesity were not enough worries for him, without a worrying sort of wife on the top."

"She might make up for it in other ways; and, anyhow, the unruffled calm can become very monotonous."

"Oh, I shouldn't be monotonous," with marked conviction. "If it came to breaking some one's head, I'd have to do it, rather than be monotonous. That's why I fled Rhodesia," running on, while a servant brought a small table up to the fire and set a dainty tea thereon. "Think what I might have been driven to in an extremity if I had elected to make it my home. I should certainly have got landed for manslaughter. Fancy *one* man, week in, week out, morning, noon, and night! Why, if he were the Angel Gabriel himself I'd hate the very sight of him in a month."

"You and the Angel Gabriel," with a slow smile, "would just about wreck the peace of Heaven."

"Do you know what I'd do with St. Oswald, if I had the misfortune to be his wife?" suddenly attacking the theme uppermost in her mind, "I'd start off by making him gloriously drunk—dead to the world, don't you know—singing 'Hold the Fort' or 'Dinah Duck, my Chucklet Chuck'—and then I'd teach him a few swear words—and I'd get some one to pick a quarrel with him and make him fight them. I'd put him right back at the beginning of the average school-boy's education, and knock a bit of manhood into him. He should also have a cold bath every day"—in accents that suggested the ferocious old lady in the familiar advertisement.

The doctor laughed whole-heartedly—in a way he had not laughed since he left Rhodesia.

"I'm beginning to think dear old Burnett has had a let off, after all."

"Of course he has. He'd have wrung my neck out there in three months—if I hadn't shot him first. Why I'd go mad—stark, staring mad—with those kopjes sitting there staring at me all day, and those fools of black-boys. It was because I liked him I didn't marry him; if I'd cared a little less I might have experimented. All the same, matrimony's a snare and a delusion for man or maid

begging your genius's pardon. It's right out of my beat altogether. Now, own up, doctor, isn't taking a spouse under existing laws just buying a pig in a poke?"

"My courtesy forbids my naming such a name for any of your sex."

"Which means you heartily agree."

"Perhaps—but as I perceive no remedy——"

"Rubbish. That's what they all say—and so men go on buying a pretty face with fair words, and as soon as ever they're quite sure of her, the fair words probably turn to oaths. They've no business ever to be quite sure, that's my contention—seeing they're mostly brutes after all."

"Yet I haven't a doubt, in the club and cave age, women were much more happy and satisfied than they are now."

"That's quite likely, because then the man was taken on his merits as a brute; and if your brute were twice as strong and handy with his club as your neighbour's brute, you naturally soothed your bruises with pride and glorification. If a big, powerful man clubbed everyone who stood in the way, and dragged me victoriously by my hair to his cave, I expect that I should settle down and cook porcupines and hedgehogs and wild cats for him quite happily—even in Rhodesia. Of course, if he wasn't strong enough for your taste, you'd naturally ogle a finer brute, and he'd come along and club the way clear to his cave, and the scandalmongers could go to Hades. Good old times those! Evolution is getting a bit tedious nowadays; what a pity we can't have a little devolution for a change, and see what happens."

"Bloody gore," said the doctor, "and a globe strewn with carcasses."

"With the fittest left in triumph to start a new race of healthy, vigorous humans, and see if they can't make a better job of it all round."

"Not much work for any poor physicians who escaped the general slaughter, I'm afraid."

"A good thing, too. The mere idea of so many doctors, all with their hands full, makes me ashamed of the human race. I wonder what would become of St. Oswald? Can't you imagine him waiting with a self-glorifying smile, for the chariot of fire to come down from Heaven, and getting run over by a motor-'bus in the process?"

She had purposely led the random conversation back to the Grants, hoping he would give her his confidence.

"You haven't asked after your godson yet?"

"I don't know that you've given me time. Heavens!" with a sudden glance out of the window, to the street and its passing hansoms. "What a far cry from here to that shady verandah! I feel as if Joyce and her baby were on some other planet."

"Poor Joyce," with sudden softness, "I always feel she was specially designed to laugh, and through some mishap she strayed the wrong way, and got into the place of a weeper. Any groaning scarecrow could have washed and cooked and sewn for that man."

She put her cup down and suddenly got up and roamed round the room.

"Doctor," she said, studying the names of some books in a book-case, with her back to him, "don't you feel she ought to be here now, pouring out your tea for you, and soothing your tired brain with that delicious low laugh of hers? Don't you think that it is here Life must have originally meant her to be?"

The doctor made no answer, but he hid his face with his hand, leaning on the arm of his chair.

"Of course, I know it's monstrous sacrilege, and all that, but Mother Grundy and I quarrelled long ago; and a woman like Joyce matters. The average stuffed dress-stand might as well worry and waffle in a Rhodesian wilderness, as anywhere else." She continued to fidget restlessly, waiting for him to speak, but he only sat silently hiding his face with his hand.

Dinah glanced towards him, and then said, again in that softer tone: "Of course, I know Joyce wouldn't come. She's the most loyal little soul that ever breathed, and, wise or foolish, she's likely to stick it out to the bitter end. I admire and deprecate all in a lump. I want her to stay that I may love her loyalty, and I want her to come that I may love her pluck and independence." Then, as he still did not speak: "Am I trespassing? Don't be vexed with me. I'm absurdly fond of those two babies, for Joyce doesn't seem much more, and while I am free and happy, she is bound out there. It's a relief to speak of it."

"How should I be vexed?" in a low, intense voice. "What you feel about it I am probably feeling a dozen times over."

She came across to him. "And is there no solution? No possible rescue?"

"None."

"Then thank Heaven she's got the child."

"Amen."

"I don't know much about it," she was roaming the room again now, "but I imagine in most cases a child is a sort of anchor. They toddle serenely along the straight and narrow way, and the parents must needs follow. Perhaps it's all right, but I am inclined to think things might be bettered somehow. Heigho! it's a difficult question, and I, for one, have not the brains to unravel it. Also it is time I was going. Come and see me at my aunt's as soon as possible. She is longing to meet you, and there are two small cousins who will call you Uncle Cecil in the course of an hour or two. Good-bye; if you don't turn up within the next few days I shall come and worry your door-bell again, to the distraction of that small Satan in buttons who guards the entry."

CHAPTER XXII

DINAH ON GUARD

It was about a week later that Dinah received the following letter:

"DEAR MISS WEBBERLEY,

"The last South African mail brought me a letter from my son in which he tells me you have returned to England. During your stay in Rhodesia, his epistles so often related how you and your brother had been to his house, and he to yours, that I am wondering whether I could prevail upon you to come and see me, or to let me call upon you, to hear all about him. It would be the greatest delight to me, if it were not too much trouble to you.

"Hoping to see you,

"Yours sincerely,

"GERALDINE BURNETT."

"Ho, ho!" soliloquized Dinah; "so he sent my

address, did he?" Then she relapsed into a meditative silence.

"What's the trouble, Di?" asked the very young-looking man, who was her uncle. "Another tiresome suitor been and gone and spoilt everything by proposing?"

"A fond mamma," she said, "wants me to go and sit down and talk to her about her son by the yard."

"Well, tell her he made love to you, and she'll soon get tired of it."

Dinah's lips twitched, but she only said: "I think I'll tell her he's painted himself black, and wears a skin apron, and talked a language I didn't understand."

"You'll need a protector if you do. Better take old Bouncer along; he's got two teeth that will still bite, and he can look ferocious," fondly pulling the ear of an antiquated bulldog beside him.

"I don't think I'll go. I'll write and say I'm just leaving town for a time."

"Nonsense, Di," from her aunt; "you can't be so unkind. Suppose you had a boy in a far-off country!"

"Well, it would be the best place for him under the circumstances," flippantly

"That's it, Di! Hit out straight and take the other chap's breath away when you don't want to argue."

"Now don't encourage her, Ralph," with a severe head-shake. "I shall drive her to Mrs. Burnett's to-morrow afternoon, and not leave the door until she is safely inside it. You can send a note round this morning," addressing Dinah.

"Rash woman!" was that young person's comment. "You ought to know by now, that when I am taken where I do not want to go, disaster usually follows. Dr. Lawson can tell her more than I can."

"Men are so stupid. They always relate the things a woman is not interested in, and describe the scenes she doesn't want to see. Only another woman knows what to say and what to leave unsaid."

"Hit out again, Di!" exclaimed outraged majesty from the opposite end of the table, "and avenge the best friend you have in the world."

The long and short of which breakfast conversation was, that the following afternoon Dinah's aunt motored her to Eaton Square, and kept the motor standing while Dinah rang the bell and awaited admittance.

When she heard footsteps coming, and the door on the point of opening, she slipped back to the motor a moment, determined to get even with her aunt, and exclaimed in an emphatic undertone, "I'm going to tell her he's got two black wives, so there!" Then she jauntily remounted the steps and vanished through the open door.

In the drawing-room a handsome, grey-haired lady sat waiting in some small trepidation. It was so unlike Ted to mention any woman at all in his letters, that the constant repetition of Miss Webberley's name had not unnaturally made her thoughtful. Apparently there was nothing definite between them at present, but it was fairly evident there might be eventually, and when she asked Dinah to come and see her, at her son's suggestion, she had a half-thought it might be in order that she could give an opinion. Of course, Ted would always act for himself, she had long ago learnt that; but he was also a most devoted son, and might in this instance be willing to be guided by her counsel. So it happened that her feelings were divided between delight at the thought of seeing some one who had so lately talked with the beloved firstborn, and a wish to show reticence until she had formed an opinion.

All this Dinah guessed by divination, and while Mrs. Burnett sat waiting, and persuaded herself the sort of girl Ted would care for would certainly be a sweet-faced, low-voiced, dignified, queenly creature, she mounted the stairs with the expression of a terrier on guard, and vowing vengeance black and overwhelming upon all who had had a finger in putting her in such an ambiguous position. "If she says 'my dear' I shall stamp with rage," was her last thought as the butler threw open the door and announced her.

Mrs. Burnett certainly had had some intention of greeting her affectionately, but whatever endearment was intended ended by taking the form of a little gasp.

"Why in the world your son ever mentioned me I can't imagine," announced Dinah, almost before the formalities were over. "We were deadly enemies."

Mrs. Burnett recovered herself with an effort.

"Oh, I think not."

"But we *were*. We fought like—like—hedgehogs; you know, prickly-all-over sort of fighting. Do you mean to say he never told you about it?"

"Indeed, on the contrary, he led me to suppose you were great friends," still struggling to get over her first shock.

"Ah, that's just his way," calmly. "He was pulling your leg."

Mrs. Burnett was astute enough to perceive quickly that this remarkable young person was, so to speak, on guard, and she at once began to readjust herself. She laughed lightly at Dinah's undignified phrase, and replied:

"Well, if you will have it so! But, tell me, is he looking well and strong?"

"As fit as a fiddle, and as strong as a horse. I believe he was particularly anxious you should be impressed with the fact that he doesn't live on locusts and wild honey. I'll just give you a menu of the sort of little dinner he has: Caviare, soup, fish, partridges, venison, apple dumplings, savoury, cheese, and dessert. That's only quite a small affair, mind you."

Mrs. Burnett now began to be thoroughly amused.

"Really," she commented; "I don't wonder he isn't keen to come home."

"Home!" echoed Dinah. "Oh, he'll never come home any more! Why, he's waited on hand and foot by obsequious black-boys, who fetch and carry and sew for him like slaves. Besides, they're all kopje-struck out there. I've a twin brother lives near him, you know, farming with two friends, and I don't suppose the crack of doom will stir them from Rhodesia."

"But we quite hope to see him next year."

"Don't hope any more, then," was Dinah's consoling advice. "You'll have to go to him, the same as I had to go to Billy. Candidly, it's a case of Mahomet and the mountain. They eat, and sleep, and shoot, and dream in blissful content, and forget all of us, out there. We think they're savages, and they, *now* we're mere amateurs, who haven't grasped the veriest rudiments of true enjoyment. I tell you, it's a shock to go out with a ship-load of sympathy and encouragement for the poor exiles, and find yourself quickly the centre of heartfelt commiseration."

"But how interesting!" Mrs. Burnett got up and moved her chair a little nearer. She did not feel at all disposed any longer to address her visitor as "my dear," but she was losing her heart to her all the same, in quite an unexpected direction.

"And when are you going back again?" she asked, which was not quite a well-chosen question.

"Going back?" emphatically. "Why, *never*. It's a desperate existence to my thinking. I never want to see a kopje again as long as I live, much less smeli a nigger."

Mrs. Burnett gave another little gasp, and her readjusting continued apace. If Ted was never coming home, and Miss Webberley was never going back, it was manifestly off the cards for matrimony to be in the air at present.

"You don't paint a very inviting picture," she said; "but I really think I shall have to go and see for myself."

"I should if I were you, and you must be sure and go to see The Irresponsibles, but let them know you're coming, or they may be minus clothing."

"Really, Miss Webberley, what in the world happens to them all? Have they gone back to the beginnings of things?"

"Something of that sort. I believe your son still washes occasionally, but to hear Billy and Jim and Beauty talk you'd think they'd never heard of soap. But, of course, they mustn't any of them be taken as types. They would come more under the monstrosity heading."

Tea came in, and Mrs. Burnett busied herself preparing it, while Dinah, who, having established her footing was now rather enjoying herself, ran on:

"Your son is called Sir Galahad out there, because he's always so spick and span, and such a nailer with the fair sex. He rides into Salisbury, got up regardless, and the whole place is in a flutter."

"Then he must have changed very much, for I never knew a man who bothered less with ladies."

"How odd! Why, they're all in love with him for miles round out there. He'll really have to end in marrying two or three to save bloodshed."

"Indeed, I hope not," with a light laugh. "I don't know where the poor mother-in-law would come in."

"You ought to see his family silver," branching off in another direction: "he's got a fearsome old pewter teapot and coffee-pot, which he dotes on, and we call it the family silver. He does himself uncommonly well though, generally speaking. We liked going to his place to dinner, because you never ran the risk of having a tin plate, or having to sit on an old wooden case for a chair, or getting landed with

a tin mug for tea, without a handle, that was too hot to pick up. Those little trifles are mere details at Billy's. You take them along with the snakes and frogs, and things that walk into your bedroom at any hour of the day or night."

She rattled on a little longer, and then stood up to go.

"It was very nice of you to come," Mrs. Burnett told her warmly, noting with a critical eye as she did so how perfectly she was dressed, and how distinguished she managed to look, in spite of her lack of beauty.

"Don't mention it," said Dinah graciously. "I only hope I haven't alarmed you in any way."

"Why, no," laughing; "the description of the little dinners alone is reassuring. I hope he isn't developing into a glutton."

"I shouldn't exactly say that, but I think it's a pretty generally recognized fact, that if you're hungry, Captain Burnett's is a good place to get to. He's a brick, anyhow, at taking the unfed in. But, then, taking them all round, they're all more or less bricks over there. I fell madly in love with about half a dozen of them."

Dinah was preparing her last shaft. "Did he ever mention Major Egerton to you? The man who distinguished himself so at Spion Kop? He's such a topping good sort, and he's coming home in a few weeks."

She moved towards the door with her head thrown back a little and the very spirit of mischief in her eyes. "I expect I shall see a great deal of him," she finished. "He and Billy and I were almost inseparable. I'll tell him to come and give you a little more information about Captain Burnett, if you like. Good-bye, please don't thank me. Tell your son when you write, that I never gave him away once," and with a bright nod she went off downstairs, and afterwards took a quick walk towards the park, shaking inwardly with glee over the interview.

Mrs. Burnett did something the same, for she sat and laughed silently when she was alone, and, later, regaled her husband with a witty description of her original guest. But Dinah had scored a complete victory in one direction, for Ted's doting mother actually expressed an opinion at the end of her discourse that implied she would even be ready to welcome the announcement she had half dreaded.

Dinah, for her part, fairly convulsed her youthful uncle

at dinner that night, and equally frightened her aunt, who remembered that Mrs. Burnett's friendship was not a thing to be despised, and her good word a useful factor in any society.

"My dear woman, there's nothing to make a fuss about," Dinah finally assured her; "all mothers think their sons' girl friends are laying snares for them, and it's just as well they should occasionally be undeceived. You made me go against my will, so you can only thank yourself for the consequences."

"But you might have been more circumspect out of consideration for him."

"Why! I told her to tell him I hadn't given him away once."

"You're quite incorrigible," shrugging a pair of beautiful white shoulders. "Are you coming to the drawing-room with me?" getting up; "or going to stay and flirt with Ralph?"

"I'll let Ralph off to-night," rising likewise. "I know he's dying to loosen his waistcoat. I don't want him to have an apoplectic fit, and leave you and the children on my hands."

"How dare you——" he began.

"No use," she interrupted him. "I'll bet you ten to one you're three inches bigger round the middle; why, you've grown a positive kopje since I went away!" and she slipped out before his indignation could frame a retort.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN ARGUMENT AND A VISITOR

DINAH was right when she surmised she should see a good deal of Major Egerton after his arrival home; and it was certainly not his fault that she did not see considerably more. Neither was it her aunt's.

"My dear child!" remonstrated that youthful lady, as if she were talking to her grand-daughter, "what can you want more?" She was reclining gracefully under a standard lamp, with a shade that harmonized particularly well with a beautiful dinner gown, while Dinah sat on the rug by the fire, which was her favourite spot.

"I don't want more," was her obstinate reply; "I don't want so much. I don't want any at all. Besides, he hasn't offered himself yet. You're always in such a hurry to shove proposals into men's mouths."

"Just as if you didn't know he would propose if you would let him. It's too silly of you, Di. He seems to me just made for you. You must own you like him."

"I like his boots. I've always maintained he wears the nicest boots of any man I know."

"Well, you can't marry his boots unless you take him inside them."

"No, that's the trouble," with a light laugh.

"Don't be such a goose. Try and be rational for once in your life. Ralph and I think no end of him, and Ralph is an excellent judge of men. He'd make you a splendid husband."

"It's you that's the goose, Truda. What in the world should I do with a husband? He'd be sure to get left behind with some of the other luggage, if I attempted to take him round on my travels."

"Well, you've had travelling enough, and it's time you settled down. Heavens! where haven't you been in the last eight years?"

"I haven't been to Finland. I thought I'd see about starting next week."

"Not you, Di—you hate the cold too much."

"Yes, that's so. I nearly died of it in Canada. My eyelashes froze together, and when I wanted to cry I shed icicles."

"Well, to go back to the Major—has he proposed or not, honour bright?"

"He has not," emphatically; "there are no flies on the Field-Marshal. Catch him offering himself unless he's jolly sure the offer will be accepted. We're the best of pals, and I hope we'll stay so."

"I don't. I say, he's the best chance you'll ever get, and you're a fool if you let him go. Anyone can see the man's devoted to you, and only wants encouragement. And as I said before, what more do you want? He's exceedingly good to look at—well groomed—distinguished—charming. He's got a nice place near Reading, and he's not badly off. He's a man to his finger tips."

"It is not enough," asserted Dinah. "I don't want a husband, but if I ever have one, I'm going to be just *me*

in all the world to him—and he's going to be just *he* to your delightful niece. There won't be any need of embellishments, nor any parade of virtues and good points—perhaps there won't be any of either—but he'll be just he—and I'll be just me—and that's got to stand for something that's different from all the rest."

She got up and strolled to the piano.. "You didn't know I was a sentimentalist, did you? That remarkable sentence must be rather a shock to you. I'll sing you 'Mother says I mustn't' while you collect yourself." And she thumped out a familiar strain that effectually drowned all further expostulation.

Nevertheless, Dinah was not quite as indifferent as she professed. The Major *was* a good sort, there was no denying it, and she was getting weary of roaming. She liked everything about him. She liked his boyish laugh, she liked his *camaraderie* whenever they met now—the absence of sentiment—the unaffected enthusiasm when they were both extra-lively and went sight-seeing together. To hear him laugh at the theatre was as good as the play itself, and she loved the way he gave coppers to all the crossing-sweepers, and bought flowers he didn't want from the flower-girls, and more matches than he knew what to do with. Always, after being out with him, she returned pleased with herself and all the world. Always, if she felt at all "blue," the sight of him cheered her up.

Only there was something lacking. Why did she parade his good points to herself? Why did she need to tell herself he was such a brick. In Dinah's creed, which she kept hidden away in her own heart—love should be spontaneous, irresistible, outside all questioning, persuading, embellishing. The man she would love might be all sorts of things, so he enchained her, held her, drew her. At least, she would never weary of such an one, for his personality must needs be stronger than hers; and that, it seemed to Dinah, was the one thing that mattered. Like most strong women, she was ready to be mastered—nay, wished it—only where, oh! where, was the man who could enchain this dare-devil will and free, fearless spirit, that was yet afraid of the "terribleness" of love? Often when she tried to reason things out and face the question squarely, sifting and probing her unmistakable liking for her Field-Marshal, Ted Burnett's strong, grave face persistently showed itself upon her mental retina. The little word "if" would soon follow,

and it took all her strength to tear it out, and trample that image away.

If she made the plunge and became engaged to Major Egerton, would it not go peacefully of itself, and leave both her and Burnett free to follow an unimpeded path? The impossible is easiest forgotten. She reasoned that if she built a barrier that neither could pass, he would soon forget her and his wound would heal, and another would make him happy; while she would banish that persistent image altogether, and escape the terrifying aspect of love, reaching the haven without venturing out on the dangerous sea at all—which unworthy thought proved Dinah something of a coward after all—a coward and a shirker, who would take the prize without the fight—the peace without the storm—the haven without the perilous voyage.

Only, fortunately for her, it is not given to us to choose. When Life sees a man or a woman is good material for moulding, she is apt to take the matter in her own hands and send that spirit out into the battle-field and the tempest, that it may have a chance, through many hard knocks, to be knocked into shape, and fulfil its own rich promise. Which, for those who have eyes to see, and ears to hear, should still all feeble repining and restless fretting under the hand of the modeller, and give a man a steadfast, unflinching front to meet the storm, since only through that same storm and stress can he reach the gates of Life's truest Eden, and the portals of the Highest and Best.

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle," saith He of old time, "than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven," which rightly translated, surely means: It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a man or woman to win that same Highest and Best in any possible way but the way of difficulty and stress, and much enduring.

The question of that plunge was claiming her attention more than ever the day she left the Major and his sister at Hyde Park Corner after a motor ride, and elected to tramp home across the Park. She had been back about six months now, and was perhaps a little weary for a fresh sensation, yet not inclined to start on further travels. Not that life lacked interest or change. It still held a great deal more of both than falls to the lot of many, but it also held a nameless unrest from which she seemed unable to free herself. She envied the doctor his calm devotion to

his work, observing that, however tired he was, and however he might secretly long for Joyce, he yet wore the quiet air of one who is daily achieving a result that held satisfaction; and she realized that though Life had denied him his heart's desire, it had at least partially filled the blank in giving him this blessed skill in healing. As long as Joyce was well and happy she knew he would steadfastly follow in the path that lay before him, and stifle vain regret in useful work. If Joyce were not well and happy? . . . ah! there none could surmise, but Dinah remembered how once, when they were all three together, she had had that vague sense of tragedy in the air. It only remained to hope that Life would in future wreathe Joyce's path with smiles.

But nothing soothed her own restlessness. She even found it in her heart to envy her aunt, giving so much absorbing attention to her butcher's bills and grocer's bills, and dressmaker's bills, and the children's frocks and lessons, and the amiable Ralph's digestion. And Billy, of course, had his mealies, and Joyce had her baby, and Burnett had his animals—of them all, she alone had to try and manufacture interests that would fill the hours with other than boredom.

Small wonder the Field-Marshal's cheery, hopeful disposition made him a more and more welcome companion, and that she strayed deeper into the maze of indecision.

The vigorous exercise of her walk across the Park after the motor ride suited her mood, and helped her to think things out in a vigorous, strenuous way that satisfied her professed contempt for over-much sentiment. Nevertheless, she had not made any notable advance towards a solution when she entered her aunt's house, and was greeted by the butler with the news that a gentleman was waiting to see her in her own private sitting-room.

"What is his name?" she asked. "Has he been here long?"

"He did not give a name," the man told her, "and he has been here about half an hour."

Dinah mounted the wide staircase and turned down a little side passage to her own particular sanctum, filled with curiosity. But no sooner had she opened the door than she hurried forward with outstretched hands, exclaiming delightedly:

"Why, Beauty! you here! how splendid!"

Beauty took her hands and smiled in response, but something in his eyes made her stop short suddenly, and ask with an anxious note :

"What is it? What is the matter? What has brought you home so unexpectedly?"

"The Little Brown Mouse is dying," he told her quietly.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LITTLE BROWN MOUSE

'WE'RE in need of a friend, Dinah," he went on, speaking a little huskily, "and I've come to you first."

"That was good of you; I'll do anything—*anything*."

"Ah, but wait till you hear what I want. You may be horrified."

"I think not. Tell me."

"It has been in Dulcie's mind for some time, and in mine too, that if the end seemed coming suddenly, we would be married, so that I could take care of her to the very last." He stopped a moment, as if he could not trust himself to speak, and a sudden dimness suffused Dinah's eyes. "It is a question of weeks," he finished, "and I want to marry her at once."

Dinah caught her breath. "I'll do anything you want."

"I want rather a lot." He smiled now with the old, ineffable smile. "There's a dragon elder sister—you understand—and she won't hear of it. We've got to manage it while she is absent. I don't know anyone else who can help us but you."

"You don't need to know anyone else. I tell you I'll do anything."

"Then, Dinah—" he suddenly leaned forward and touched her arm—"will you come on Friday afternoon at two o'clock, and bring a clergyman with you?"

She looked at him with a glance of interrogation.

"I don't know anyone," he said, reading her mind; "I haven't a clergyman friend in the world. That's why I had to come to you. It's not quite fair, but . . . but . . . if you knew my Little Brown Mouse . . ." His voice broke and he suddenly got up and walked to the window.

Dinah got up also, too much moved for a moment to speak. Then she went and stood beside him. "I'll come, Beauty, and I'll bring a clergyman. You needn't have the smallest fear. I'll manage it somehow."

"Bless you!" he breathed. "I—I—can't thank you. Perhaps Dulcie will be able to."

"I don't want any thanks. It is a privilege. I'm proud that you came straight to me like this. I only wish . . ." she hesitated; "it's so little use to say one is sorry . . ."

He nodded gravely.

"Will you tell me something about it all before you go?"

"I got home a week ago. She was taken worse suddenly and sent me a cable. It had always been arranged that she should. I caught the next boat. The cable came out to the farm on Friday night, and I caught the mail train on Saturday morning. Jim did nearly everything for me. He's known all along, you see. He sent his love to you. They both did. Everything else is just the same."

"And Joyce?" anxiously.

"Jim told me to tell you she hadn't a thought beyond the child, and she was too wrapped up in it to mind anything else in the world. He's been going over oftener since you were out, and he says it's always the same. The child is all the world to her, and they both look well and happy."

"What a trump Jim is! You couldn't have brought me better news. I've a sort of feeling of ownership over those two, you see, and I care a lot about Joyce being happy. Now tell me more about your Little Brown Mouse," gently.

"She's very happy; you will see for yourself. If only I could bear the pain for her . . . but she persists that she has no time to remember it now I have come, and that she wouldn't change places with anyone in the world. I must go back to her," rising. "She will be so anxious so hear my good news. Bless you again. You will have made two anxious ones very grateful to you to-night."

Dinah was very quiet all the evening, and her aunt wondered greatly, but her efforts could elicit nothing at all, and she had to be content with hoping that she had softened to the Major at last, and might eventually marry him.

And all the time Dinah was busy with her plans for Friday, and had not a moment to spare for a single thought

of the Field-Marshal. She did, however, manage to scribble a few lines to the doctor, telling him of Beauty's return, and the good news he brought about Joyce. And the next morning, at an unusually early hour, she went out on a mysterious errand that her aunt could glean no information about, but from which she returned with a glad look, as of something successfully achieved.

So it happened that on the following Friday, at two o'clock, Dinah arrived at Dulcie Maitland's home in Hampstead, bringing a kindly clerical friend with her, and also the ever kind and ever sympathetic doctor.

Dinah went into the sick room first with Beauty, and she thought she would never forget the radiant expression of the poor pinched little face on the pillow, with its wonderful, haunting eyes. It seemed to Dinah she was all eyes; it was difficult to realize anything else at all. Her features were indistinct, even the glossy brown hair was hardly noticed, so imperiously and absolutely was her whole being dominated by her eyes.

She just looked at Dinah, and every particle of her frail form seemed breathing gratitude through those speaking orbs.

"I'm so sorry——" began Dinah softly.

"Oh! don't be sorry," came the low, eager answer; "no one must be sorry for me to-day."

Dinah stood silent. She felt suddenly as if she was in the presence of something awe-inspiring and divine; as if she was standing upon holy ground. Beauty rested one of his strong hands on the tiny frail one of the sufferer and smiled down at his Little Brown Mouse with unspeakable tenderness. Dinah wondered how he could smile. She kept her own lips tightly closed, feeling as if the slightest relaxation would twist her face all ways to keep her from breaking down.

Then Dulcie spoke, looking up into Beauty's eyes: "I can't thank her," she said; "no words seem good enough."

Dinah mastered herself quickly. "Don't try," with a forced smile, realizing that neither pity nor commiseration were asked for here. "See, I've brought you a little wedding present," and from a small parcel in her hand she unfolded a delicate wrap of exquisite lace. "I thought you would like to feel as bridal as possible," she finished a trifle huskily.

"How perfectly beautiful! Only I shall never, never be able to thank you," regretfully.

"I am pleasing myself all the time," with an attempt at gaiety. "You see, I'm dreadfully in love with Beauty, and I couldn't give it to him, so I had to give it to you. Go and fetch Mr. Metcalfe and the doctor," she told Beauty; "they're in the dining-room."

Then directly he had gone she arranged the scarf with deft, clever fingers on the small head and shoulders.

"You look so beautiful," she said gently, and, stooping, kissed the low, white forehead.

Dulcie smiled up at her, again with that rapturous look in her eyes. "Don't cry," she said; "it's so wonderful that Bertie and I are going to be married. It's the most transcendently wonderful thing in the world. I'm sorry for everyone to-day except myself, because they are not going to be married to Bertie."

Then the door opened and the others came in, and immediately afterwards the service was read.

Later, the clergyman said a few kindly words to the little sufferer, while Dinah and the doctor stood aside, after which the two men went away together, leaving the bride and bridegroom and Dinah alone. The poor little bride was becoming painfully exhausted now, and before he went, the doctor gave her something to revive her and advised Beauty to keep her as silent as possible for the next few hours.

"Let Miss Webberley interview her sister and explain everything," he urged, "and you stay just quietly beside her."

So Dinah watched Beauty gather his Little Brown Mouse in his arms with that same unspeakable tenderness—his very own now for the short time that remained—and again she was awed by a sense of holiness. How wonderful, indeed, it was—how passing wonderful! This strong, gifted man, with his perfect face and perfect form, his richness in Life's good things, his choice undoubtedly, had he wished it, among many beautiful women—and that little frail, wasted creature. And Love had worked the miracle—not pity, nor the righting of any wrong—Love the all-powerful—all-conquering—even between this man in his wealth of vigour and beauty, and the child-woman, whose richness of nature could only express itself through the windows of her soul.

Dinah stooped and kissed the white forehead again, then went noiselessly downstairs, drying her eyes. She

was oppressed with a sense of her own poverty—the barrenness of her life, beside even that little sufferer's. What could she, with all her possessions, win for herself to compare with the wealth of love that frail, little creature had won?

How had she ever done it? How had she ever thus enslaved the ineffable, peerless Beauty?

But it was not the why and the wherefore that claimed her thought now. The thing was there, incomprehensible as it might seem, undeniable, complete. It was another glimpse into the deeper things of Life that was holding her mind. Another glimpse on a par with the wonderful mother-love she had seen through Joyce. The love that asked only to give—give—give itself for the beloved. A brief glimpse of what divine exaltation might lie behind the “terribleness” that she still so feared. Without braving all—even that pitiless, devouring flame that held the element of terror—could she ever hope to attain? And if she chose not to attain, through cowardly dread, what could heaven or earth ever give her for one moment of all she had perhaps voluntarily laid down?

When Miss Maitland came home, to be confronted with what had taken place during her absence, she found a Dinah who would not have been recognized by many of her friends, so subdued was she.

“They are married,” she said simply to the strong-faced woman before her. “I am waiting here to tell you. I am a friend of Mr. Sinclair, and I brought a clergyman to perform the ceremony, and another mutual friend, Dr. Lawson. It is no use being vexed with them—besides—a little bitterly—they are so blissfully happy they wouldn't notice it; but you can get mad with me if you like, and have it out.”

“A lot of good that would do,” shortly. “You don't look as if you would take much notice.”

“No, I don't suppose I should; but I thought you might feel better for it.”

“Well, you're honest, any way.” Then she turned on her heel and stood looking out of the window with a set face. Suddenly she turned. “Of course, you never thought of me,” a little fiercely; “none of you troubled to do that! Haven't I nursed, and fed, and watched over her ever since she was a baby? Haven't I been a mother to her all her life—up with her night after night, day after day—tending, nursing, loving; and here at the end, you,

who have probably never spent an anxious hour or an anxious thought for anyone in your life, calmly take her away from me and give her to another."

Dinah winced visibly. This was an aspect that had not occurred to her.

"Do you wonder I wanted to keep her wholly mine? What else have I ever had? What else shall I have in the future? And you, whoever you may be, and Bertie Sinclair, both no doubt loaded with the world's pleasant things, come behind my back and take her away from me. She was mine by every just right. You are both thieves. You have taken from me all I cared for in the world."

"Oh, don't say that!" Dinah put her hands out before her dumbly, with a bewildered sense of pain and regret. The unlooked-for turn of the situation seemed almost to have undone her. For the first time in her life she had nothing to say. If her companion had stormed in anger she could have stood it easily; but the hunger in her bitter words cut her to the quick. She could only look at her helplessly in silence.

Miss Maitland waited a moment, then once more turned on her heel and looked fixedly at the blank faces of the houses opposite, seeing nothing but her hurt.

Dinah stood still by the fireplace and tried to collect herself—tried to think of something to say not too pitifully commonplace. And all she could do was to follow humbly again, with that sense of poverty growing, in this still further revelation of the Divine in Human Nature. For through all her efforts, she seemed to see only one thing; that wonderful love again, that was all giving—giving—giving. It suffused her and held her. She could *not* think coherently. She felt suddenly that if relief did not come from somewhere she would burst into tears in a few minutes.

Then Miss Maitland faced round again.

"I suppose you haven't arranged for him to take her away?"

"No, oh, no"—earnestly—"and we never thought of it quite in your light. I'm sorry you feel like that about it," stammering a little; "but," with sudden pleading, "you won't be hard on them . . . she's—she's"—with a long breath—"so divinely happy."

The elder woman looked keenly at her.

"No; I'm not that sort. The thing's done now, and

can't be undone, and I daresay it's a natural ending; anyhow, it's how the mother-love generally ends. All the care and anxiety and nerve-strain for years and years—then a comparative stranger calmly taking your treasure out of your arms."

"Still, you had the treasure—and you know the mother-love." An incomprehensible longing made Dinah step suddenly nearer to this strong-faced sister woman. "If you knew how impoverished I feel to-day—how . . . how . . . *unblessed* . . ." She stopped short, trying to steady her voice. "It's such *real* love, theirs upstairs—and yours, and Joyce's—and I feel left out in the cold somehow. I've only Billy for my very, very own, and he's the other side of the world," with a little choking gasp.

The other woman's face softened with amazing suddenness.

"You're tired," she said half sharply; "you must have some tea. I'll get it myself. See—sit down by the fire. I won't be long."

Dinah sank into a big arm-chair and burst into tears.

"There—there—" in soothing tones. "You're just over-tired. You'll be all right when you've had some tea."

And Fate, who is not always harsh and unkind, smiled softly, because she had already, from the most unexpected quarter perhaps conceivable, given the elder woman's hungry mothering instinct a new object to expend itself upon.

"Who would have thought? Who would have thought?" she muttered to herself as she bustled about forgetting all else for the moment.

But that is just one of Life's tenderest charms—from the most unlooked-for quarter—in the dreariest time of all—she has ever a trick of suddenly showing a silver lining and becoming even satisfying.

CHAPTER XXV

DINAH HAS A TROUBLED MIND

Joy did not, as they had half hoped, prolong the sufferer's life. Rather it was as though she was carried away on a great wave of joy into the very heart of peace.

Scarcely a month later Beauty came to tell Dinah that she was dead.

He was very quiet about it, and he said very little, but his eyes were hollow and dark with night-watches and his face somewhat drawn.

Dinah knew better than to offer much sympathy in words. She had never quite lost that sense of awe of the hidden mystery of beauty in the love of these two, and she had not dared to come very near to it. Only once again had she seen the Little Brown Mouse, and it had seemed to her she was more than half angel already.

"It is no shock," Beauty told her, "because we have always had it beside us. From the day I first loved her I have seen the shadow come nearer. Perhaps it was just that that made her so unspeakably dear, and kept my heart absolutely hers when we were far apart. And perhaps it was just that also that gave her that ethereal, mysterious, indescribable charm. Always in her eyes there seemed to me to be a vague mystery as if her feet had already strayed into the pathways of some other richer existence; as if her soul, denied so much here, had burst hidden bonds, and found its way already to some brighter light. You will understand that I cannot wish her back. Neither," he added, after a pause, "do I regret anything but her pain. I feel that, in knowing her, and loving her as I have, I have been rich beyond ordinary mortals. I know that I have had something which crowned heads might envy me, and—I am content."

"What shall you do now?" she asked him presently.

"I am going back to The Knoll at once. To me there is a mysterious loveliness about a Rhodesian night that is nearer than anything I know to her loveliness. She has so long been the companion of my thoughts there, that it will not seem as if she were dead. Death is rather a terrible word. I do not like to apply it to her at all. Out there I shall forget that she was ever still, and cold, and silent in the grip of the dread spectre, and see only her eyes, steadfast and luminous, as the Southern stars. No one will ask me questions, and no one will mar the perfect harmony of my dream with a discordant note of criticism or curiosity."

He looked at her a moment with a little tender smile. "You didn't know I was a mystic and a dreamer, did you, Dinah? I hope I don't seem very mad."

"I am twenty-eight years old," she told him, "and it seems as if only in the last year had life taught me anything worth learning."

She went with him and Miss Maitland to the funeral the following day, and again she could only marvel at the outwarm calm of the two whose lives were left desolate. She wanted to weep uncontrollably herself, and only mastered the inclination with an iron effort.

The quiet, unobtrusive way in which Beauty divined every possible need of the sharp-featured, elder sister, and gave her support in silence, alone, brought a lump to Dinah's throat, and it was with relief she finally left them and drove straight to the doctor's.

"Talk to me," she said, lying back in his big chair; "I need soothing and renewing. Too much virtue has gone out of me. I do not know myself; and—and—I am afraid."

"What are you afraid of?" He was pouring out tea for her, after arranging her footstool and cushion.

"I don't know. Everything. Imagine me a patient with a troubled mind, and give me healing."

"I will. But you must tell me the symptoms. Fear alone is not a sufficient guide, and 'everything' is too vague."

"I am afraid of the big things. Life, Death, Love, Eternity. I feel myself an atom, appalled by the magnitude of the Eternal Verities."

He stirred his tea in a thoughtful silence. Finally: "I'm not sure that you shouldn't have gone to a clergyman. I am only a doctor of bodily ill."

"You are a man," decidedly, "a clergyman might not be. You are more, you are one of the finest men I have ever known."

He looked up quickly with a deprecating action, and then smiled.

"If I thought you were serious, I should at once condole with you on the poor quality of your friends."

"You could please yourself about that; but you wouldn't shake my faith in the belief, that I have been singularly fortunate in meeting chiefly those specimens of the human race, who were the littlest bit of all lower than the angels."

He flushed and kept his eyes lowered; her generous praise was very sweet to him.

"Lastly," she added, "as I told Joyce Grant, I don't believe in singing people's praises when they are mouldy corpses, for fear you'll make them too glad when they're just wriggling, contradictory humans. As if the only persons whose praises are really worth being sung, aren't the sort who are dissatisfied with themselves and all the better for a little kindly dew. From which you may deduct that I shouldn't, for instance, sit down and seriously tell that earl's great-grandson in Rhodesia that he was one of the finest men I've ever known. He would merely congratulate me on my having at last been clever enough to see it."

"You're too hard on him. He means well, and he tries to live according to his lights. It is the most any of us can do. The merit lies in the effort being genuine, and the reward, if there is reward, will surely lie there too."

"It takes a saint to see it, and I'm not one. I'd like to put that man in a bag, and jump on him, till he's pulp. And I suppose he'd like to burn me at a stake."

He could not help laughing at her very conclusive full stop.

But all in a moment she was serious again.

"Is that your creed, doctor? just doing one's best according to one's lights, independent of devils, and angels, and hell-fire, and harps of gold?"

"It is."

"And suppose one has no lights at all?"

"It is difficult to suppose it, unless the brain is fundamentally diseased."

"I wonder what mine are. Chiefly sticking to a pal through thick and thin, I suppose, and taking the fences as straight as possible. But then you head me off right away with a fence I can't get over, hereditary disease, the unfortunate who never had a fair chance."

"I own it's a hard one; it entails so much suffering to others; but for the individual himself there is always the saving clause, 'to whom much is given,' and its relative conclusion concerning those who have little."

"I don't like it," with a queer little movement of her lips; "it makes me uncomfortable. You see, I'm among the much-ers."

"Well, if you take your fences as straight as possible,

and help the lame dogs when you come across them, and get up pluckily when you come a cropper, and try to get back into the running as quickly as possible——"

He paused. "That's a great theme of mine. The *pluck*, the sheer, splendid pluck, in getting up after a cropper, and clearing the stains off as quickly as possible, and going right back into the field, determined to be in at the finish. That shows what a man's made of. It's only the coward, man or woman, who lets a fall drive them out of the run because of mud-stains, or rents, or disfigurement. Just as if we weren't all as liable, one as the other, to come a cropper, the good riders as well as the bad, only some have got better mounts, and some know the ground, and some have the luck. For my part, I've rather a weakness for the dust-stained, provided they make a good fight of it right up to the last gasp. It generally shows they didn't shirk the tough places."

"Yet you are so singularly free from them yourself," she could not help adding.

"No, I have my share, perhaps over; and, in any case, it would be the accident of the better mount, don't you see? That is the whole point. It isn't necessarily any special credit to me. It might only mean that I was better equipped. The man covered with mud-stains might have ridden a better race, might be a better rider all round, only his obstacles were perhaps worse, and his general equipment less reliable."

"I see. It's what you said before, the merit lies in the effort, and not in the result. Heavens! if they all talked like that instead of hurling sin, and evil minds, and evil bodies at us till we're sick, there'd be a lot more riding straight and playing the game."

She got up and roamed round the room, then sat down again and dashed headlong into another subject.

"I'm sending some things out to Joyce by Beauty. A dream of a muslin frock for her birthday, and a silk blouse for next Christmas, and a sunshade for the one after, and a silver belt for Michaelmas, and the quaintest little garments you ever saw for the precious godson; what are you going to send him?"

"What can I send?" anxiously. "What would she like me to send him?"

"Umph! Well, he's hardly big enough for a bicycle, or a motor; what about a flying machine?"

"Get something for me, will you? Get anything you like. I don't care what it costs."

"Right you are. He shall have bears, and rabbits, and elephants, and gollywoggs, and all sorts of things. *Mein Gott!* Doctor, if we'd only got him here, we'd—we'd *kill* him with toys. Just thinking of him makes me feel better. Kiddies are so blissfully outside the pale of Eternal Verities and Hidden Mysteries. They're just *there*, and you've got to look after them morning, noon, and night, or they fall into the fire, or drown themselves in the bath, or suck the mustard spoon. I shall adore that little scoundrel of Joyce's. I shall be the most fatuously idiotic maiden aunt he ever had."

The doctor looked hard into the fire, and Dinah knew he was seeing things far away.

"Did she nearly die?" she asked him suddenly.

"Very nearly."

"She's not strong, I suppose?"

"Not strong enough for that country, and—" drawing a breath—"for that life."

"She'd been fretting, hadn't she?"

"Yes, breaking her heart for a little sympathy, and real companionship." He knit his forehead suddenly.

"I'm afraid it's a fallacy that the women in the colonies always hang together, and help each other through thick and thin. I'm afraid often they don't do either all they might, or all they ought."

"Poor Joyce! She's a proud little thing, you know. She'd never ask for sympathy. She'd just smile on and pretend she was happy, and die smiling."

He drew his hand across his eyes. "She won't need to ask any more," he said, as if to reassure himself, "now she has the child. I'm glad Jim goes to see her so much. I liked Jim immensely."

"I should think so. The dear old Ugly Bug." She got up and commenced putting on her gloves.

"I'm healed, doctor; what's your fee?"

"Another call at the earliest opportunity."

"Trust me. I'm only afraid of a horrible scandal. All the windows opposite have eyes already, and when I appear they signal to each other instantly, and there's a whole chorus of 'Here she is again, the hussy! poor, victimized, young doctor!'"

They went down the stairs laughing.

"I must have a cab. The Field-Marshal is coming to dinner, and that means an extra twist to every third wave, and ten minutes' consideration which frock I look the least objectionable in."

"What! Has he made such strides as that?"

"Strides!"—as she gathered up her skirts to climb into the hansom; "I tell you that soldier-man moves by leaps and bounds, and takes a precipice as if it were the garden wall."

"Poor old Ted!" said the doctor softly, as he went upstairs again; "and I quite hoped he'd win in the end."

CHAPTER XXVI

DINAH BREAKS OUT

As Dinah passed her aunt's door on her way upstairs, she was arrested by a call from within.

"Oh, Di, how late you are!" cried that youthful relative from where she stood before a long pier glass looking unusually lovely in a new gown just come home. "Do come and see my dress. Ralph says it is too low. Do you think so? He's such an old woman about some things; but, of course, I don't want to overdo it. He says it seems to him a waste of money to have a bodice at all if there's only such a bit of it! Did you ever hear of such a thing!"

"Never—on my word—he's disgusting! If I were you, I'd go down without one just to pay him out——"

"But do tell me, Di—and *do* make haste—you'll never be dressed in time."

"My revered aunt, you know perfectly well if I said your dress was too low, you'd merely call me an old woman as well as Ralph. It depends upon what you want to show? From some points of view it mightn't be thought low enough."

"Now you're horrid, Di. I detest you when you are sarcastic, you're the most loathsome person I know in that mood."

"It's all right, Truda. Don't worry yourself. I'll tell Ralph I never saw you look so splendid before, and he ought

to have your neck and arms modelled. He'll swallow it all right."

"Lady Godiva Stuart is coming," a little diffidently; "you will be nice, Di, won't you?"

"Lady Godiva Stuart coming here to-night! Now, Truda, I told you if that odious old woman ever came, you must get me out of the way, or you'd be sorry for it."

"I know you did, but she wanted to come to-night; and I wanted you to be here because of the others. You must be polite to her. Of course, she's detestable, but she's bound to leave most of her money to Ralph, if he doesn't offend her."

"Ralph's got quite as much as is good for him, and if I were he, I'd throw it in her face before I'd take it as a favour."

"But he might lose his—one never knows—and there are the children to think of. Now run away and get dressed, and do be affable to her for a few minutes."

"If you're wise you'll keep us as far apart as the house will permit. I've been wonderfully good for the last few weeks, but I shouldn't wonder if I don't break out to-night, under provocation," with which Dinah hurried away to get dressed.

"I've been living in rarefied air," she told Major Egerton at dinner, in answer to his question as to what she had been doing with herself, "and I'm rather glad to find myself on a familiar level again."

"What was it? Christian Science, or Greek Philosophy, or the Beauties of Buddhism?"

"Neither," her eyes softened suddenly. "It was a Little Brown Mouse."

He glanced up with interrogation.

"I don't want to talk about it now; I'll tell you some other time. It's a real life poem. But the Little Brown Mouse was Beauty Sinclair's wife, and we buried her to-day."

"His wife! Beauty Sinclair married!"

"Yes. I'll tell you another time. To tell you now would be like reading the Bible at a pantomime. Did you ever in your life see anything so obnoxious as that sour old figurehead, who calls herself Lady Godiva Stuart, and is poor, unfortunate Ralph's aunt?"

The lady in question, sitting up in a particularly starched

fashion, wore a grey dress with a good deal of scarlet trimming, and a rigid bow of scarlet crowned iron-grey hair, dressed so stiffly as to give it rather the appearance of carved grey marble. She had a high colour, which clashed with the scarlet, and her expression was scarcely less stony than the marble precision of her hair.

The Major glanced cautiously down the table, and then went on with his soup.

"You needn't mind saying it," said Dinah; "she's not *my* guest."

"Is she your aunt, too?"

"Oh, good heavens, no!—don't suggest it. She's the kind of aunt who has to be asked at intervals, and just before she comes Truda hunts up all her various presents, which are more than we can bear daily contact with, and plants them about in prominent places. That's because she has expectations. Of course, they're Ralph's expectations really, but I don't think he cares a tinker's cuss whether he gets anything or not, so Truda has to try and work the oracle."

"Of course, you help her?"

"I! Not much. Truda always tries, if possible, to get me discreetly out of the way. The Figurehead and I usually come to blows or thereabouts. But I must tell you about the flower-pot. She gave them a red and green thing—I can't describe it—I daren't—you wouldn't believe me—but Ralph and I couldn't live and look at it. Truda was braver—she'd her expectations, you see. We bore it through one visit, and then it was mercifully hidden from view. Presently Aunt Godiva comes again, and without remembering to prepare Ralph, Truda sat him down to lunch in front of the flower-pot. Ralph came home worried—and when he's worried, he's what you call, in men, a trifle testy; in women, it's called bad-tempered. He greeted the great and terrible one somewhat off-handedly, and we went to lunch. The moment he had sat down, he exclaimed, in a moment of horrible forgetfulness: 'I can't sit in front of that damned flower-pot. Take it away, some one!' I was so overcome, I snatched it up, with my one object in life to turn my back to the table, and on my way to the sideboard I *dropped* it! You ought to have seen Ralph and I shaking hands with each other afterwards; but Truda fairly tore her hair. Ralph persisted it wasn't worth £2,000 a year, to sit in front of such

a thing, and he'd sooner take me to a theatre as a reward for breaking it."

Later they played bridge in a small drawing-room, while the non-card-players talked small talk, and theatres in the big; and Dinah congratulated herself that she had escaped collision with the object of her invincible detestation. Unfortunately, however, her aunt, in a fit of reckless defiance, overthrew the house of cards at the last moment. When the card-players strolled in, she drew Dinah unconsciously into the danger zone. The next thing Dinah realized was a pair of stony, greenish eyes, looking her rather haughtily up and down, and a harsh voice saying:

"Ah! Miss Webberley, how do you do? This is the first time I have had the pleasure of seeing you since your last travels abroad. I hope you found them very instructive?"

Dinah, irremediably victimized, felt as if she would burst if she didn't hit somebody, and vowed her aunt should regret it.

"Oh, *most* instructive," she answered jauntily. "I learnt a lot about mummies, and sarcophagi, and domesticated insects, and those sort of things."

There was a sudden little cough behind her, but when she glanced round, the Field-Marshal was poring intently over some beautiful Indian photographs.

The Lady Godiva Stuart looked sternly down at her rings, which, it must be admitted, were well worth looking at, and decided to try another subject.

"I heard you met my friend, Mrs. Elsmere, on your homeward journey. I used to know her very well. How did you get on with her? She is a most capable and well-read woman?"

"I couldn't stand her stockings," said Dinah; "thick, black, ribbed wool ones, don't you know. Now all really nice people wear thin open-work ones, preferably to match their shoes."

This time half the Field-Marshal's photographs went on the floor, and he himself was quickly grovelling after them—which was a pity—as he missed the fiery hauteur in the dragon's eye, and Dinah's really engaging smile.

"Your humour, if it is intended as such, is hardly becoming," with crushing emphasis.

"But nothing was further from my mind," Dinah

assured her, with an innocent expression, that gave her suddenly a speaking likeness to that other twin over the sea.

There was a short pause. Dinah folded her hands in her lap and waited.

"Have you met your new Aunt Eliza yet?"

"I have had that mis——no, I mean, good fortune."

"I hear she is a most praiseworthy woman, and will make Alfred's children a most excellent stepmother. So sensible of him to choose a really domesticated girl. What is she like?"

"Like! Oh, she's something of a cross between a cabbage and a kettle—one singing on the hob, don't you know—exactly as it ought to sing. Not much in my line. I prefer Aunt Freda. She's more like devilled sardines' brains on toast."

"But your Aunt Eliza is really domesticated, is she not?" ignoring the flippancy of Dinah's tone.

"*Rather!* Her cakes are a positive model of determination. You feel that cake knew it had got to rise, or die in the attempt; but the currants have a lonely air. Then she sews—oh! *how* she sews!—turns all the sheets and pillow-cases, and counterpanes and pillows, and curtains, and those sort of things, sides to middle. I'm not quite sure what it means, but that's what she calls it. By the way, I believe Major Egerton could enlighten us," glancing round; "but no doubt you know all about it. I should, only I was badly brought up. Billy and I used to like turning father's hats sides to middle, but I expect that isn't quite the same thing. Anyhow, we weren't commended for it—we usually got turned sides to middle ourselves."

"I understood she was wonderfully clever at dress-making," growing more and more severe, as Dinah grew more flippant.

"So she is. I was coming to that. With infinite pains, and *lovely* little stitches, she devises blouses that . . . that . . . remind you of the pews in an empty church. Oh! and she loves spring-cleaning," dashing on, "lots and lots of it; and big families, heaps of babies—all twins—don't you know; and she thinks Uncle Alfred looks beautiful in the choir, and is a *perfect* husband. Why don't you go and see her? You'd *dote* on her. She's *exactly* your sort."

By this time, even from the far end of the room, Truda had discovered sparks were flying, and Ralph's expectations

probably getting jeopardized, so she hastily made an excuse to cross, with the idea of getting Dinah away as quickly as possible, and soothing ruffled feathers.

Dinah watched her coming with a detached air of indifference, and made no attempt to move.

"You two are monopolizing each other too long," Truda began pleasantly. "Won't you go and talk to Mr. Hitchcock, Dinah? How did you get on at bridge to-night? Any luck?"

"Yes," with calm distinctness, "the Devil's own. As usual the Field-Marshal trousered all the oof."

Truda looked dumbfounded, and the Lady Godiva too scandalized and horrified for words; while Dinah sat between them, smiling with an air of blissful serenity.

"Lady Godiva and I have had a delightful chat, Truda. It's too bad of you to drag me away—but, of course, I mustn't be greedy—and I'm dying for a smoke. . . ." She got up. "We must discuss Aunt Eliza further another day," graciously, "but do take my advice and go and see her. You *would* like her so much"—with which she moved away. Slipping through the door with Major Egerton, she encountered the amiable Ralph coming in from the billiard-room.

"If old Lady Gorgonzola cuts you off with a shilling, Ralph, it's Truda's fault, not mine. I warned her, and she ought to have known better."

And then, in response to his amazed query: "Lie low for a bit, Ralphy. It's Truda's mess; let her get you out of it," and she vanished behind the Major's tall form into a conservatory.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MAJOR PROPOSES

It was not until about a month later that Dinah told Major Egerton about Beauty and his Little Brown Mouse. They were riding in the Row together, at a non-fashionable hour, and there were very few other equestrians about. He reminded her of her promise himself, adding that he had always thought Beauty a bit of a mystery.

"He scarcely ever came to town," he explained; "and

yet, of the three, I think one would expect him to be the gayest."

Then Dinah told him of everything, and about the hard-featured elder sister who had so wanted to keep her for herself to the very last.

"I felt rather a beast," she finished; "I really hadn't any right to interfere."

"On the contrary, I think you were a brick. Hers was a more selfish wish than Beauty's, and the dying girl surely mattered the most."

"Well that, of course, was why I did it, and I've tried to make up since. I go and see her occasionally."

She did not tell the Major how, in reality, she had been a true godsend to the lonely woman—taking her out in the motor, and talking to her by the hour of the little dead sister and Beauty; which was all she had the heart to talk of at present. They went to the grave together, and Dinah spent pounds on flowers, chiefly because it seemed to so delight the elder woman. With her strong features melting strangely, she would arrange them with the utmost precision and care, while Dinah waited a little wearily; and then come away wonderfully cheered to a cosy cup of tea during which her companion listened patiently to panegyrics by the hour. But no one knew she ever went there at all. It was a fence she was taking entirely on her own. She smiled a little inwardly, when Miss Maitland, trying to thank her, told her how she would do anything in the world for her, and she must never forget it, if any service were possible.

Dinah thanked her and promised, feeling that it was more than unlikely such occasion could arise. But that is one of the things we never know: the hour or the day when we may need a helping hand from the most unlikely of those about us.

But what the Major did glean for himself was that speaking of Beauty's love-story had made Dinah a little softer than usual, and a little less difficult to approach seriously.

And so it happened that in a very short time he was asking her to marry him.

Dinah rode quietly beside him, and listened with an unusually sobered air.

At last she looked into his face. "You'll think me a fool," she said; "but, frankly, I don't know what to say."

"You mean that you don't know if you care enough?"

"I suppose so. Yet it seems so stupid of me. I've always rather a contempt for people who don't know their own minds."

He rode on a little way in silence.

"I like you so much," she continued presently; "I always have. But when I ask myself if I should care just the same if you were poor, and just nobody, and hadn't any prospects, I'm afraid to answer." She lowered her voice a little: "You see, it's part of my creed that none of those things matter at all, when one cares in the right way."

He looked hard at the road ahead of them.

"Aren't you a little . . . little, perhaps, too romantic? After all, it's a very commonplace, matter-of-fact world we've got to live in."

"I know it is. And I've always made rather a boast of being crudely matter-of-fact myself, and far enough removed from over-much sentiment. Yet I can't get round this fact. Besides, now I've told you, you probably don't feel the same yourself?" glancing at him interrogatively.

"Yes, I do. I think a downright good liking, and a real sense of fellowship is as good a basis as any upon which to float the matrimonial ship. I think it outlives many a frenzied passion."

They rode slowly on in silence till at last Dinah said:

"I don't know what's the matter with me. It's a jolly world, and there's such a lovely lot to do and see in it, yet I think I'm getting *blasée*; I don't seem to want either to do or see."

He glanced at her suddenly.

"There isn't anyone else?" he half suggested.

"No," slowly and in perfect faith. She stroked her horse's neck with her whip. "I've always thought with you that a real good liking is the best thing, but lately I haven't been quite sure; notably, since I saw Beauty with his Little Brown Mouse. You can't think what those two were to each other. When I looked at them I felt that it *must* be worth while."

"I doubt it. What has he now but regret?"

"That's just the strange thing. He has so much else. He didn't regret anything but her suffering. He said he had had something that crowned heads might envy him."

"He is a sentimentalist."

"Yes. He said he was, but then all the time, he looked so *satisfied*. That's what I can't fathom. All that long separation and pain, and yet to be mysteriously satisfied. As for the little sufferer, she was radiant. I can't tell you what it was. It is simply incomprehensible. But ever since I've been vaguely restless and vaguely discontented."

"Perhaps you had better think over what I have said," he told her finally; "I see you are thoroughly undecided, and I don't want to hurry you. In any case, I hope it won't make any difference to our friendship. It has been more than pleasant."

She thanked him gratefully, and they put their horses to a gallop before going in, the Major finally leaving Dinah at her door and riding away alone.

"Has he said anything yet?" was Truda's persistent question that evening, as they sat over the drawing-room fire.

"What about? His tailor's bill? I believe he said he couldn't pay it."

"Tailor's bill! Don't be silly. Has he asked you to marry him?"

"My dear Truda, is it likely a man of the Field-Marshal's advantages, wanting a wife, would waste time offering himself to any one with a face like mine."

"A face like yours—such nonsense! If you were as ugly as sin, Di, the men would flock round you. When haven't they done?"

"That's only to be amused. It doesn't follow they want to sit opposite me at breakfast every day, and see me the bearer of their august names in proud assemblies."

"Oh! I've no patience with you!" getting up and hurling a book at a cushion. "I want you to marry the Major, and I know he'd ask you if you'd let him. He's a dear! I've a good mind to make him run away with me, just to spite you."

"And leave me the fat and amiable Ralph!" in accents of horror. "My dear, he'd die under my treatment. He'd have to do Sandow's exercises in the morning, punch ball at noon, gymnastics in the afternoon, and play diabolo all the evening. No, indeed, you've let him get fat, and you must put up with it; you took him for better or worse!"

"How you talk! He's not noticeably fat. He hasn't got a corporation!"

"Truda! How can you? And you the mother of three! Why, he, or rather *it*, is positively aggressive. He always looks to me as if he were trying to hide behind himself."

Truda sat down again laughing, just as the maligned one came into the room, and no more was said of the Field-Marshal.

But Dinah could not get him out of her thoughts, and long at her window she looked silently across the moonlit park.

And down the shadowy vistas she saw waving mealies, and tree-crowned kopjes, and sun-smitten veldt, framing, as it were, a strong, grave, resolute face. If he had been in the Major's place would she have hesitated a moment? Would she not easily enough have persuaded herself that his position and prospects were nothing, and, rich or poor, she would have been ready to go with him to the world's end?

Why, then, could she not take her courage in her hands and brave that far-off land?

"But even if I wished it now, I could not go and tell him so," she argued, forgetting, or ignoring, the very thing Billy had urged upon her. "It is certainly quite impossible for me to go out there again. I should feel as if I had come to ask him to give me another chance. I wouldn't put myself in such a position for all the world; I'd sooner die." She shook herself restively. "I'd better accept the Major quickly, I think, before I make a fool of myself. I shall see him on Sunday."

But before Sunday came Destiny had shot another bolt, one that hit them all, and it was as though an earthquake had changed the face of the earth.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"TOO LATE"

RAIN—rain—rain! Oh, *how* it rained that long February! Day after day, day after day—sodden skies, sodden kopjes, sodden farm.

The rivers overflowed and washed away the drifts,

washed away acres of mealies, burst the dams, wrecked the irrigation furrows.

There was no dry wood for the fires—nowhere to dry the clothes; no possible chance of getting out into the air.

Both Oswald and Joyce, in their separate avocations, were at their wits' end. He could do nothing to save his lands, and merely got soaked to the skin each day in wasted endeavours.

Joyce was nearly frantic with fear for the child, and with the overwhelming difficulties of keeping the household going under such conditions.

"Had I better take him to the hotel in Salisbury?" she said at last, pointing out how pale he was getting for want of fresh air and with the clinging damp atmosphere.

Oswald looked more worried than usual. "It's so expensive. If we could anyhow manage without? Of course, you must take him if you think he ought to go, but I'm worried to death about the crops, and how we're to keep going."

Joyce was utterly at a loss. Only the baby seemed unconcerned. From the rug before the fire he looked up at them both, and smiled ravishingly, as much as to say: "Don't worry about me, I'm all right as long as there's puppies to play with."

Joyce caught him up in her arms, and he crowed with delight, catching at her hair—her face—her watch-chain. She was like a new being. Her eyes shone—her smile was divine—her whole aspect was richer—fuller. Yet she looked ill and worn with the anxiety of the persistent rains. She was in a constant fear, night and day, lest the child should suffer. He had thriven splendidly, but always there was that frail look about him. He was too much like an exquisite Dresden-china model. He had his mother's blue-grey eyes, and delicate fairness, and little soft, sun-kissed curls, and her sweet temperament and naturally sunny disposition. Joyce was quite right in thinking a more perfect babe of eleven months could not exist. And apparently he was none the worse so far for the continual rains, as he ailed nothing in spite of his paleness.

So she decided to stay on and risk it, and not add further to her husband's worries. Otherwise, she would dearly have loved the change. She had been at the farm nearly

two years now, and never been away for more than a day occasionally the whole time. And—which had perhaps tried her most—never got away from Oswald, and his persistently depressing personality.

Always it had gone on the same—either that chronic grievance, or that uncalled-for self-complacency. Always the assumption that what came to them of good was in some unexplained way through his merit and his ability; always that what came to them of ill was the more difficult to comprehend because he felt he had not deserved it. Always the unspoken understanding that it was his tastes, and his tendencies that mattered; while she, being only a woman, was expected to take her tone from him in everything. She, of course, must try to enter into his feelings; it was his right as the male—but she could not expect him to go out of his way to try and enter into hers—which were certainly less interesting and less important.

To a temperament like Joyce's, it could only have a brick-wall, numbing effect, but she held her child close against her heart, and never forgot that he was his father. For the child's sake she turned her eyes bravely away from everything that galled, and, while knowing her love, if she ever had any, had long since died, she kept alive as well as she could, respect and gratitude, and some sort of affection.

They were, at least, at one over the little one.

Nothing was too much to do for him—nothing too much to get for him if he needed it. They bowed down unanimously, and it held them together. Not that Oswald had ever changed to Joyce. There had never been any question of worship—it was not in him to worship. He had needed a wife, and she had pleased his fancy, and so he had done her the honour to choose her.

It was more like a proposition in Euclid than a love-story; and it would have seemed fitting enough to him that it should be so. Joyce was undoubtedly the victim of an unfriendly chance, for she, of all people, was made for love, strong, deep, and overwhelming—but—well—she had her child.

The day Beauty brought her the presents, from Dinah and the doctor, she listened a little hungrily to all he had to tell her about them, sitting on a rug the while, upon which the baby performed wonders of crawling. He

stayed longer than she had ever known him, and he seemed wonderfully taken with the crawler.

He picked him up, which was rather new for Beauty, and smiled a little wistfully when the tiny hands clutched at his face and hair.

"He thinks you are Jim," Joyce told him. "He and Jim adore each other; but he can't quite make out the difference." She laughed delightedly as the baby puckered his small forehead and scrutinized Beauty with a pair of solemn eyes. "Jim suddenly grown handsome is too much for him."

"He doesn't seem to mind strangers," Beauty said, still holding him tightly.

"Not a bit. They interest him profoundly. He has always liked people better than toys, and he idolizes dogs. Anything in the shape of a dog he clamours for."

"He's a grand little chap." Beauty put him down, still with that wistful expression, and prepared to go. "Miss Webberley is crazy to see him, and talked a great deal about the times she is going to have when you are both with her next summer."

Joyce smiled softly with her face against the child's. "That's when we're going to pick daisies and buttercups in Devon, and play with the baby waves, and watch the ships go by. He knows all about it. It's our favourite topic of conversation."

Beauty smiled back into her happy smiling eyes, and then went slowly home up the valley. The stars were just coming out in a rain-washed sky that, for once, was cloudless. They looked unusually bright. Beauty saw that pair of eyes, which he had known he should see, shining steadfastly into his from some quiet, far-off heaven. He was sad with hungry longing that those same dear eyes could never smile at him from a tiny baby face, but he walked very upright, and looked steadfastly back into the Silent Immensity around. For Beauty had always shown a brave front whatever came to him, and always would, though life gave him none of the things he ached for.

It was three days later that Jim found Joyce in trouble because the child was so listless.

On the lands he had been talking to Oswald, who was in one of his most self-complacent moods. The rains had ceased at last, and they had not done nearly all the

damage he had been bemoaning through the month. Moreover, hearsay and inquiries elicited the fact that he had suffered less than any of his neighbours. This, of course, was both encouraging and gratifying. Evidently it paid sometimes to be good. Certainly he must make the most of every atom of produce he had, and get on quickly with the ploughing of some new land that had escaped the ravages of the floods. All this was so manifest to him that he felt it was rather unreasonable of Joyce to once more broach the subject of a move to Salisbury for a few days with the child. It was so extremely difficult to spare the mules for a whole day, and so unnecessary now the rain had practically ceased. Certainly the poor babe was pale and a little languid, but he would soon pick up in the sunshine, and he was not fretful at all, as he certainly would be if he were ailing. He mentioned the subject to Jim, just to ease his mind; then went placidly on with his work while Jim went up to the house.

Oswald remembered long after in his bitterness how the sun shone on him that day, apparently with the smile of God. His work had prospered beyond the work of others; his wife continued to prove herself all that he had chosen her for with so much perspicacity; his child was an angel for sweetness and beauty. He felt a little sorry for certain bitter things he remembered saying, of how it is not true according to the Psalms, that the righteous man shall prosper, and of how one might just as well be indifferent and careless. After all, perhaps he had expected too much. Anyhow, the future stretched away full of fair promise.

He stood up to survey the work of the mules on the new ground. What splendid soil it was, it would have been a sin not to turn it over as quickly as possible. Silly of Joyce to look so upset when he demurred about sending her to town. Of course, if it had been urgent—— But Jim would cheer both of them up. He always did. . . .

Jim found Joyce looking a little haggard, and instead of crawling on his rug, the child was lying listlessly on her knees.

"I don't know what's the matter with him," looking up with pain in her eyes; "he's been like this ever since yesterday, and he doesn't want his food."

Jim laughed down at the mite and talked baby lan-

gnage to him, at which his face puckered up into his usual enthralling smile.

"You young monkey! pretending to be ill like this—such affectation! when you're as fat and plump as a little pudding. Over-eaten yourself, that's about it."

The baby continued to smile ravishingly, but he did not as usual hold out his arms to be picked up. Jim lifted him from his mother's lap, noticing that he looked very blue under the eyes.

"I wanted to take him to town, but Oswald couldn't very well spare the mules, and I didn't think he was ill enough to persist. What do you think?"

"I think it's just the effect of the unhealthy weather we've been having. He'll be all right in a day or two. He's only listless."

He walked up and down with him, whistling softly, and the little one dropped asleep.

"He scarcely slept at all last night," Joyce told him; "but I don't know why. He was just restless, and couldn't get comfortable. I was up with him on and off for hours."

"Why not go and lie down now in case he has another bad night; then you'll feel fresher for it."

"But I'm afraid he won't rest in his cot."

"I'm not going to put him in his cot. I've got nothing to do for an hour, and I'll take care of him while you rest. Now don't be obstinate," with a laugh; "you know perfectly well I love having him. How often am I to tell you that I adore babies—only you're not to give me away."

Finally Joyce went and lay down, and was soon fast asleep, and for a full hour Jim soothed and caressed the restless child. When she came back, feeling thoroughly refreshed, he told her as cheerfully as he could that he thought the mite was a little feverish, and if the following day were quite fine, she had better take him in to the doctor. Joyce tried not to be unduly alarmed, and made preparations accordingly.

When the morrow came, however, the rain had come back, and a tropical downpour made the roads impassable. Unfortunately the child was worse.

"I ought to have gone yesterday," she said anxiously.

"But he really didn't seem ill enough," Oswald reasoned,

partly to reassure his own anxiety, remembering that it was his fault she had not gone.

"I think a boy had better go in and ask the doctor to come out," she suggested.

"But, my dear child, no doctor would come twelve miles such a day. You couldn't expect it. We will take him in to-morrow for certain if he is still ailing."

"But it may be as wet to-morrow."

"We'll get there somehow, if it is. Don't fret unnecessarily."

Joyce turned away to the tiny sufferer with a dreadful sick feeling at her heart. She had been up with him all night, for though his father wanted to take him, and tried again and again, he would have no one but her. He was very feverish now, and growing more and more restless, and quite unable to take any food. One moment he lay like a little limp rag on her knee, and the next he panted and struggled to get into a comfortable position. She could only watch through the long hours in a growing agony. Of course, he would get well, no thought other than that entered her head; but in the meantime it was dreadful to see him in such a condition and not be able to do anything. "All babies are ill when they are teething," she told herself over and over, "but if only I could see a doctor to reassure me!"

Then the old horror of the land tried once more to get admittance. The sense of flaunting heartlessness which had so blinded and crushed her when her pony died. What was one little babe to those heartless solitudes—one tiny thread of life, where war was made on the strongest men, by the untamed lands which resented conquest to their last gasp.

At night he was decidedly worse, with a rising temperature. Joyce said they must send for the doctor now, and *make* him come. Oswald looked out at the black, rayless night, and the sound of the flooded river alone broke the stillness. In the afternoon the drift had gone, and the banks been washed away in many places. It was only possible to wade over, and that would be extremely perilous; almost impossible in the pitchy darkness. He came back to Joyce with a scared, anxious face.

"It's quite impossible to go to town to-night," he said; "I'll try and go myself in the morning."

Then Joyce wavered no more. The child was lying still, half-doing, and she bade Oswald remain and watch him for a moment, herself hurrying from the room.

Half an hour later, Jim was awakened in his sleep by a knocking at his bedroom window, and he got up hastily and lit a candle. A black arm was thrust into the room, holding a small note, and a boy saying urgently : "Boss Jim—Boss Jim——"

Jim took the note and held it to the light. It contained only one sentence :

"Please try and get a doctor here to-night, the child is dying."

For one moment the whole room seemed to go round, and he caught at the bed for support. The next he was getting into his clothes. Outside it was raining in torrents, and above the swish of the rain rose the roar of the flooded river. No horse would face such a night. He pulled a soft felt hat down hard over his ears and rolled up his trousers. "Tell Missis, Boss Jim run all the way," he said to the boy. Then he swung out into the night—nine miles of nearly impassable road ahead of him, and a flooded river to ford on foot.

But ere the morning sun shot his first ray across the waiting land Joyce's child was dead.

CHAPTER XXIX

"HUSH !"

In the house a little child lay dead.

Over the tops of the impassive kopjes, striking gaily into the corners, and under the leaves, driving away the lingering darkness, came the rays of the Monarch of the Day, and shouted that it was morning.

At the signal the big birds woke up the little ones, and the flowers got ready to unfold themselves. They looked at their reflection in the dewdrops, opened their petals coquettishly, and shook hands with the sunrays.

A faint whisper came among them, like the voice of a rumour that has no birthplace, and goes even as it comes.

"*The little child is dead,*" said the whisper. "*Hush! Be still a moment and listen—the little child is dead.*"

But the small birds were too hungry, and the flowers too much occupied with their toilet, and the grass too heavy with dew, to have time to heed.

Then the farmyard woke up. The Leghorn cock called to the Minorca cock that he was a lazy brute, and the Minorca cock called back that anyhow his hens were getting up, and there were no signs of the Leghorns about. After which both cocks got angry and tried to shout each other down.

Evidently they had not heard yet.

The turkeys commenced gobbling next, and strutting about to stretch their legs, while the ducks kept up a perpetual clamouring to be released and get to the water.

Strange that the whisper was so persistently unheard. Yet it kept on. At last some little breezes woke up and came down from the trees. They heard it first. For a few moments they appeared staggered, then they commenced to carry it about as well as they could.

"*Hush!*" they breathed everywhere. "*Hush, oh, hush! The little child is dead.*"

The river seemed to hear first. From noisily rushing and tearing along, it dropped suddenly to a long, breathless, horrorstruck swish. Then the Wings of the Morning became arrested in their hurried business of preparing the day. They instantly whispered to the Sun, and he—aghast—hid his face behind a cloud. That frightened the little birds, and they left off clamouring for food.

In the silence the flowers stopped to listen—and when they heard, each stood motionless—horrified—incredulous. The grass was shaking itself free of dewdrops, and the dewdrops laughed and glistened as they hung on for a last moment, before they dropped.

"*Hush!*" implored the tiny breezes. "*Oh, hush! hush! The little child is dead.*" The grass left off playing, and stood petrified. The dewdrops slid down the stems and vanished. They could not bear to live and hear it.

"Some one tell those noisy cockerels," breathed the faint rumour. "They must keep quiet themselves, and keep the hens quiet, too." The breezes sped weeping

away. But the farmyard was busy, and it took them a long time to get a hearing—weeping and wringing their hands in the deafening clamour. At last, a shrewd little bantam discovered something was wrong, and climbed on to a wheelbarrow and shouted to the others to keep still a moment to hear what the breezes were trying to say. In the hush that followed only sobs were distinguishable at first, then in faltering accents came the words: "*He is dead—the little child is dead. The night winds saw his spirit go out through the silences, and they waited to tell us when we woke up.*"

Then dumbness fell upon the farmyard, and the Minorca and the Leghorn looked at each other in unspeakable dismay. They would rather never have fought again than that that little cherub should come no more to prattle to them.

The clouds were coming up now, summoned hastily to a day of mourning, and in a light shower the air commenced to weep.

Only the kopjes still flung brazen heads up into the sky. "She never liked us," they said, "and we never liked her. Why did she tell him always about the sea and the cliffs and the gulls? We are taller than any cliffs, and our birds are finer than any gulls, why weren't we good enough for him? Wavelets and buttercups and daisies, forsooth! and white-winged ships. What about our fairy armaments of cloud vessels? She always scorned us. Since he came she has flouted us more and more. But we have crushed her this time. She will flout no longer. For we are sons of the soil, and daughters of the land, *and the land took him.*"

In the house a little child lay dead.

CHAPTER XXX

A MESSAGE

"You can't take him away."

It was the first time Joyce had spoken for five hours. She had washed and prepared the tiny body herself, and then she had kissed it all over. But as yet she had shed no tear.

Oswald, struck dumb also, had sent a messenger to stop Jim and the doctor, and carry one or two notes, and made hasty preparations to take the poor little child to Salisbury to be buried, for in that pitiless land, our dead are generally hastened from our sight within twenty-four hours.

When all was ready and he came to tell Joyce, she was sitting dry-eyed and silent beside all that remained of her Life's Treasure. As far as it was possible to her to feel at all, she felt that she would never cry again. Oswald spoke very gently.

"I must take him, dear. He must be buried to-day."

"But not in Salisbury. Not twelve miles away!"

"Where else, dear? We cannot bury him on the farm. He must lie in consecrated ground."

"Why must he?" her eyes had suddenly something of a dangerous light. "It is better that he should be near me. I will keep his grave covered with flowers, and he will know that I am near, and not be afraid."

"Joyce, dearest, you can't know what you are saying. Of course, he must lie in consecrated ground."

"He is better near me," doggedly. "I want him. He is all I had."

Oswald looked ill and perplexed.

"I must take him," he persisted. "I have made all arrangements. Of course, you will come, too."

"No, I shall not come."

"Why not? Don't you feel well enough?"

"I hate the Burial Service. Somebody gives thanks. I will not give thanks."

He looked more wretched and perplexed than ever.

"I can't leave you here alone."

"It doesn't matter."

"Will you come in to Lady Marsland, or shall I ask her to come out to you?"

"I hate Lady Marsland."

"That is foolish of you. Is there anyone else you would like?"

"Jim will come soon. He will look after me."

He turned to the bed, where the tiny silent figure lay, and suddenly Joyce's eyes had the expression of a hunted wild creature driven to a last extremity.

"You can't take him away. I *can't* let him go."

Oswald broke down into tears, and leaned helplessly

against the bed. Joyce stood up. With like suddenness she changed to a stony calm that was terrible.

"Let us bury him here," she said.

"No. I can't allow it. You don't know what you are asking. It is dreadful. The cemetery is only twelve miles away."

"Then don't let me see you take him," and without one backward look, she went into another room and lay down on the floor with her face buried in her arms.

Before he started, Oswald came back and spoke to her gently, but she took no notice.

"I shall come back as quickly as possible. Try not to get ill, Joyce. Do be careful of yourself. Do think of me."

When he had gone, and the last sound had died away, she remained motionless for some time, then raised herself to a sitting position. The cook-boy came in about a meal, but she signed to him to go away without opening her lips.

It was now raining fast, and she stared stonily out of the open door without seeming to see anything. Yet she was fearfully—awfully—conscious. She knew that the house was once more empty; empty in a more terrible sense than ever before. She knew that little toys were lying in all directions; toys that would not be wanted again. The gollywogg Dinah had sent lay near her in a pathetic heap on the floor. It looked as if it had broken its heart. Her fox terrier, the baby's favourite pet, crouched a short distance away, never taking his eyes off her, and now and then he whined. Still Joyce stared stonily out at the rain, and made no sign. She believed her brain would give presently, and she waited for the moment as the only thing left.

Meanwhile, it was as though the baby's mother was dying by inches. Joyce remained. Joyce Grant, but not the Joyce that had crooned over, and fondled, and tended the little child. That Joyce went away weeping into the rain, beside the tiny coffin, and someone quite different took her place. The new Joyce had a heart that felt like a stone. It had not room any longer even for her child's father. As such he was a shadow that belonged to the life that had just ended. She knew, without exactly thinking it out, that as far as he was concerned, her compassion had died with the rest. It was dreadful, of course, but that didn't help

anything. It was *there*. In future he would again be only that grumbling, morbid, sulky, self-complacent man, who had made her life among the kopjes a burden to her. Her brain became extraordinarily vivid. She saw every detail and trial of that first year before her baby came. She saw insistently how his narrowness and bigotry had numbed her. She remembered every fit of irritability which he had vented on the animals.

She saw like a black and awful menace, the spectre of the old life making ready to come back. But now there was the change in herself to be reckoned with. Because the little child's mother had died, it did not follow that only the former enduring Joyce remained. That was where the flaunting kopjes had misjudged. They could, no doubt, have successfully crushed that Joyce, but she no longer existed to be crushed. There was another incident, beside the birth of the child, that they had overlooked.

It was that incident that now pressed to the fore, and moulded the new Joyce, entwining itself with her natural fearlessness, her natural talent to love and be loved, her swift desire for one last glimpse of those dear Devon seas, before the end.

Each Joyce was too delicately sensitive not to be easily crushable still, but it would not be the kopjes, and the silence, any more.

While this passed more or less vaguely through her mind, she sat staring silently out at the rain. Presently she got up. For the time being she had lost the power to be normal. She had to do something desperate at once, or break. But if she won through the present anguish at all, that awful hour had decided the future.

"I will make one effort first to go to my babe," was her final thought, "and, if I cannot, it is the end. Come, Kim," to the terrier, with a little tortured smile, "let us go and look for him. We will take the gollywogg in case we find him."

Then she went out just as she was into the pouring rain, hatless, and dressed only in a white cotton frock. She roamed about aimlessly for a little while, getting as wet as possible, then strolled up the valley towards The Knoll.

It was there Jim found her, standing out bare-headed in the full force of the downpour with dumb anguish in her eyes holding fast to the gollywogg, while the poor little dog whined helplessly beside her.

But over the tops of the kopjes around, was a soft veil of mist, in which they hid their flaunting heads and shrinking eyes. This was not the crushing they had meant. This was not the woman that riled them, this drenched, stricken child with the anguish in her eyes; and the infinite pathos of that useless toy, and helpless, affectionate little dog.

Joyce had done well when she pinned her faith on a man. In the blackest hours it is oftenest a man who helps a woman through.

Jim got back from Salisbury soaked to the skin and looking fearfully exhausted.

Beauty was waiting about by the house on the look out for him. When Jim came up he made an attempt at a smile.

"Get me the stiffest of stiff whiskies, there's a good chap, while I get into some dry clothes."

But Beauty obstructed him a moment.

"What then?"

"I must go over to Killarney," he caught his breath. "It'll just about turn her head."

"It's no use going in this condition. I've had hot water waiting for an hour. You must have a hot bath, then a whisky, then go to bed for two hours at least."

Jim, feeling nearly done, allowed himself to be overruled. He had a short sound sleep of exhaustion, then dressed and started straight away to Killarney.

When Joyce saw him coming she took a step forward, and held out both her hands to him. In one of them the gollywogg hung limply, looking broken-hearted.

"We're trying to get to him," she said; "it was the only way."

Jim swallowed a lump in his throat that nearly choked him, and took both hands in his in a strong clasp.

"You poor little soul! O God! you poor little soul!"

It took him a minute to collect himself, then he tried to speak very firmly.

"You shouldn't be out here, Joyce. My dear child, you're wet through and through."

She glanced down at her sopping garments.

"Yes. It was the only way. We're trying to get to him."

"Poor little woman, come along home now," and he took her hand and led her back to the empty house.

A shrinking, shuddering movement passed over her when they came in sight of the red brick bungalow.

"No, I can't—I can't," and she hung back.

He saw he must treat her like a child.

"Come, be a brave little woman, Joyce. I'll take care of you."

After a little coaxing she dragged on a few steps, but her limbs seemed tottering under her now, and she breathed heavily.

"I can't walk, Jim. Leave me here."

For answer he picked her up in his strong arms, and carried her to the house. He put her down in a big chair, and she lay helplessly looking at him. At that moment he would have given all he possessed to have a woman within call. However, there was none nearer than five miles, and, meanwhile, Joyce had to be saved.

"I'm going to put a hot bath ready for you," he told her, "and I'll wait in the dining-room while you make haste over it, and then get into a big dressing-gown as quickly as possible. Will you do this?"

She assented, and half an hour later he had her well wrapped up in rugs and shawls before a big fire, and fed her himself with hot bread and milk.

She was quite quiet now, and seemingly normal, but still she did not cry. Her dry-eyed anguish frightened him more than anything. He picked up the little dog and put him on her knee.

"You must take care of Kim, now," he said, to draw her.

The dog whined and licked her hands, but no tears came. Jim got some tea ready and waited. At last she spoke in her own natural voice, though it was very weak.

"Jim," she said, "is it better that I should live or die, do you think?"

He paused a moment, purposely.

"The sunshine is beautiful, Joyce, and the birds, and the flowers; and there's lots of us would miss you badly."

"You mightn't miss what is left of me."

"But you mustn't judge by what you feel to-day, little girl, nor to-morrow, nor the day after. You are so young yet, and your husband——"

Her lips tightened suddenly, and he hesitated, noticing it.

"I would like to go to Devon once more," she said.

presently; and then for the first time her lips trembled, and big tears gathered in her eyes and rolled unchecked down her cheeks. But no sobs came, and Jim waited anxiously, shocked to see how fearfully frail she looked already.

"Jim, you did all you possibly could for—for—my baby."

"Yes."

"Would you do a lot for me, for his sake?"

"I would do it for your own."

"Do you remember that I was dreadfully ill and nearly died when he was born?"

"I do."

"And that Dr. Lawson saved my life?"

"Yes."

"He is the only one who can save me now."

Jim leaned forward suddenly and rearranged the logs on the fire. He was a little taken aback.

"Is my life worth troubling him with?"

Still he could find nothing to say. He glanced up. Lying back in the chair she was more like an exquisite plaster figure than anything, but he could not meet her eyes, they unmanned him.

At last she again broke the silence:

"I want you to do something for me to-morrow; just absolutely for me alone."

He looked steadily into the fire. "I will."

Again there was a rush of glistening teardrops.

"How good you are."

"What is it?"

"I want you to send a cable to Dr. Lawson from me. I will write down what you are to say."

He reached her a paper and pencil, and with a weak, faltering hand she wrote her message, and handed it to him. He read it quietly and put it into his pocket.

"I've no money," she said hesitatingly. "I'm so sorry. It will cost a lot, but by and by I will be certain to give it to you back."

"It won't cost much," gently; "and in any case it wouldn't matter."

He got up and went outside to see if there were any signs of Oswald returning. He was getting momentarily more anxious at her increasing frailty. She looked as if a whiff might blow her away.

"Jim, if Oswald asks you to stay here for a day or two please say yes."

"I will, if it is any help to you."

"It is. Don't go away."

About ten minutes later Oswald came in fagged out. He looked surprised at Joyce's costume.

"Mrs. Grant wandered out into the rain and got wet through," Jim told him. "I found her and brought her home. I hope she hasn't taken cold."

Oswald went round, and bending down, kissed her forehead. The look of anguish deepened in her eyes, and again the big tears rolled down unheeded.

"Let me get you a hot whisky," Jim said to him. "You must be feeling awfully done up."

"I never touch spirits, thank you."

"But you need it medicinally."

"No, thanks. I'll have some tea," and he called the house-boy.

Joyce sat up with difficulty. "I think I'll go to bed." But she seemed unable to stand.

Jim hurried to her, and made her lean on his arm. After the first two steps he felt her whole weight on him. Her room led out from the sitting-room, and he took her through while Oswald lit her candles.

In the room, straight before their eyes, stood the empty cradle. It seemed to Jim that her face turned grey. She gasped painfully as if she could not breathe.

"It's no use, I can't bear it," she murmured, and swooned heavily against him.

She lay like a log for what seemed hours, and then began to moan. Slowly the moaning ceased and she came to herself. A few minutes later the sobs followed and they both felt her brain was saved.

"You stay, I can't bear it alone," Oswald said, and he sat in the next room with tears streaming down his own cheeks, while Joyce clutched Jim's hand and sobbed her heart out.

Jim's face was rigid as stone. He bit his teeth together hard, set his jaw very squarely, and quietly stroked Joyce's arm.

It had been the worst twenty-four hours of his life.

The next day, across the world flashed the message:

"My baby is dead. Please come.—JOYCE."

CHAPTER XXXI

WELL PLAYED

THE doctor had just seen the last of his waiting patients when the boy brought in the telegram and laid it on his desk.

He opened it, read it, and stood transfixed.

"Any answer, sir?"

"No."

The boy withdrew.

In the five minutes that followed, it seemed as if the doctor was turned to stone. He never moved a muscle. Then he drew a long breath and looked round the room.

"Shall I ever get there in time?" was his thought; and then: "What shall I do first, to be ready by Saturday?"

Suddenly he took a pencil and telegram-form and wrote on it: "Joyce cables—'My baby is dead, please come.'"
He went out himself and sent it off to Dinah. He had felt a sudden imperative need of fresh air. When he came back lunch was awaiting him, but he drank a glass of port wine, ate a biscuit, and told the boy to take it away again.

Then he went back to his study and began his preparations. From first to last there had been no faltering, though the first shock made it a little difficult to think coherently. The news appalled him. He had known it might come, but he had scarcely dared to think it. It was indeed unthinkable. Like an earthquake, it seemed to shake his whole life to its foundations. There was one short sentence, and in a few seconds the face of everything was changed.

It was, indeed, as if he had struck a bargain with Fate, and given his work as hostage. He might have said at some previous time: "While Joyce is well and happy with her child I will give you all my skill, all my knowledge, all my power, and no word or act of mine shall

add one iota of regret to her difficulties. But if ill comes to her or the child, the compact ends. I am a free man; if she calls me I shall go."

He had known directly he read the message that he *should* go, but he had to collect his stricken thoughts. Now he considered his preparations.

In those tense moments there was something about Cecil Lawson that was as the Splendour of the Morning—the Splendid Morning of the Human Race. He was a man in the grandest sense. A man great enough to step outside all written or unwritten law, the nightmare of prejudice, the bear-hug of custom, the trivial details of daily being, and stand erect, as on some high promontory, alone before the Dread Splendour of the Infinite; presenting, maybe, his case before the High Court of the Supreme Judge.

He was greater than degrees, or knowledge, or social success could make him, because of his great love. For love is the greatest and most wonderful thing in the world.

In those supreme moments there was only the woman he loved, and her Great Need.

No sooner had he grasped this than he quietly and calmly threw over everything else his life held, and commenced his preparations to cross the world to her.

The Heroes of old could do no more. Heroic love could do no less.

It may not be the recognized standard. It may not be within the precepts of the Social Law. It may not be permissible to the good citizen, who has his country's welfare at heart. But none of these could make his splendid service to the beloved one less splendid, or him less great.

He was great because he greatly loved.

It is the only spirit in which that perilous precipice of a love, which is a law unto itself, can be safely crossed. For the man or woman who falters and timidly looks back, or is wanting in that spirit which is as the Splendour of the morning—there is only the slip, the rebound, the descent—into the abyss.

When Dinah came, the doctor was scribbling some notes at his desk. The telegram had reached her at lunch, and she had got up white and horrified.

"What is it?" Truda had asked nervously. "What's the matter, Di?"

Dinah stood looking at the flimsy paper. "I can't grasp it. It's a tragedy."

"Some one dead?"

"Yes—a little child—my godson."

"Oh, Di! How sad!"

Dinah said no more, but she went upstairs to put her things on, feeling stunned.

When she came into the doctor's study neither of them stopped for greetings.

Dinah stood still in the middle of the room with the horror still in her eyes, and said:

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to her."

She had not quite recovered the first shock, and this was something of a second.

He waited, watching her. At last:

"What is the good? What can you do?"

He stood up, as if his thoughts were a little too much for him. "If she will come, I shall bring her back—*here*," with unmistakable significance.

Dinah went to the chimney-piece and leaned against it.

"You take my breath away. I'm nearer than I've ever been in my life to hysterics."

He busied himself with the papers to give her time to collect herself.

"How could you decide such a tremendous thing all in a moment?" she asked at last.

"I have been deciding it for nearly a year. I decided it the afternoon I said good-bye to her, and allowed myself only one sweetness—that of a promise that she would send for me if she was ever in great need."

Dinah was calmer and more collected now, but she remained silent several minutes while he continued to busy himself with his papers. Then her discretion and judgment prompted her.

"Have you thought of all it means? Of all this," glancing round the room, "probably to be given up? The pinnacle you have laboured to—relinquished. The good you may yet do—unachieved. The years of toil and learning possibly wasted? Of course, you are splendid," her voice broke a little, "but the world is

awfully strong. It will try to crush you. Probably it will crush you, and Joyce as well."

"No," resolutely. "It shall crush neither of us. I have served it faithfully. If it still wants my service it can have it. If not, I will make my bow and retire." He paused; then added: "With its honours, and achievements, and success, Life has given me physical ills unrelentingly, and has racked my brain with enigmas I cannot solve, and suffering I cannot appease. Joyce's love and trust may heal these. The honours and success may go."

"And what if it hurts her?"

"Can anything hurt her more than she is hurt already? Would she, of all people, have sent that message if she were not feeling at a last extremity? You know, as well as I, how frail she is; and how utterly and helplessly incompetent is her husband to keep the flicker alight, with such winds as these blowing against it. Is she to die because I am afraid to go to her?"

Dinah felt her breath coming a little unevenly. She was in very truth perplexed. At last: "Can her life or death after all be in your hands? I don't quite know what you do believe in, but I always feel only small-minded people believe in nothing and you are not one of them. Can you, under any circumstances, be the Arbiter of her Fate?"

"That is a question I can't answer. I have never for one moment doubted that there is a Power outside ourselves which in some way governs; but I can go no further. I see no reason why that Power should not now be giving me a supreme chance to prove my love. Why should it not have brought me to the cross-roads, indicating that one way I may lose the world and save Joyce, and the other, lose Joyce and save my career? There is not the slightest doubt that there will be a penalty if I break a moral law. There is *always* a penalty for law-breaking. Nature *never* relinquishes her disciplinarian attitude in that respect. But why may not that be put in the scale too? Why may not this Power say: 'Save this woman if you like, but you must risk losing your career, and possibly paying a further penalty!' And why should not I say—I *will*?"

Dinah moved into the middle of the room. "You . . . you . . . tower above me! You stagger me.

I want to go away and think. I will see you again before Saturday," and without another word she left the room.

Out into the Park she swung, head erect, eyes straight, shoulders back, seeing untold, untellable things. He had stirred her soul to its very depths. The motor 'buses in the distance were canopied chariots—the riders in the Park were knights in armour. It was the old days—the old thrilling days of romance and knighthood and chivalry. She felt her pulses thrilling to the fascination of it. She felt she had stepped suddenly into a wider and grander world, where sordid money-matches, and grasping mothers, and time-serving brides, and sneering bridegrooms were nightmares of some other day. In this new world Love was no hypocritical term to hide Vice and Desire—it was a God-attribute of *giving*—it triumphed gloriously over the petty snarls and backbiting of everyday humanity.

And it was *here*—that was the wonder of it—she had seen it for herself, right in the midst of the motor 'buses, and commonplace, hurrying, twentieth-century crowd.

She felt as if she wanted to stop people and tell them the good news. "We are not a decayed, worn-out, money-grubbing, sordid-thinking race yet. The Spirit is in us still—we can still, if we like, rise to the old soul-stirring days."

Then as she crossed the grass, the thought of the bereaved young mother crowded out all else, slackening her steps, blinding her eyes with tears. It was all too pitiful. What would become of her? What must she be suffering now? No woman friend near at all to help her. It was terrible to think of. She could *not* think of it.

Then across her mind flashed suddenly a thought. A thought that made her stand still a moment looking straight ahead.

"No, no—how could she? It was quite impossible."

She walked quicker again, the new thought pursuing her, and she trying to drown it, or to suppress it because it was so impossible.

Perhaps if it had not been for Captain Burnett she might have considered it. She was always glad of an excuse to go and see Billy. But her last interview with Captain Burnett made it impossible for her to go back yet. It would look as if she had made Joyce's trouble

an excuse to come back after him. The mere idea that she wanted to see him, thrust her further from any conceivable possibility of going. It was the false pride Billy had foreseen, and she knew it. Yet she could not break from its toils. Besides, even if she did want to see him, it might be very unwise that she should. She might be weak enough to get engaged to him, supposing he asked her again, in spite of Rhodesia and its kopjes. No, of course, she could not go. Yet her heart yearned over Joyce and her loneliness. She wished it had been possible to decide otherwise; that the barriers were not so impassable—distance, haste, unpreparedness, Burnett, and, last but not least, the probable scandal. No one liked to be mixed up in Divorce Court proceedings. She told herself she owed it to her aunt to keep clear, however little she minded for herself. Then a voice hammered on her brain that she could perfectly well keep clear, even if she did go. As there would be "no defence" no other names were likely to be dragged in.

"Still——"

Her steps quickened as her thoughts grew more goading. She could not help feeling herself lacking in the very spirit she had a few minutes before been glorying in. Here was a path of "giving" open to her, and she could not take it. Joyce's beautiful face, white and frail and grief-stricken, looked at her from the trees and the grass, asking piteously for her support, for her woman's meed of comfort, and she could not bring herself to heed it.

She quickened her steps almost to a run, with her eyes on her home just ahead.

"No, I can't bring myself to go," she reiterated, "I am not made of the right stuff. I am just common clay—on the bottom stair."

When she turned into Kensington Palace Gardens a hansom came slowly towards her, and as she came level with it, she looked into the driver's face. He was looking hard into hers, with, it seemed in her fancy, more than the usual interrogation. Then he drew up. Dinah looked hard down the road once, then sprang in.

"Brook Street," she said, giving the doctor's number; "and drive fast."

At the house she deterred the page-boy from announcing her.

"I will go to Dr. Lawson's study," she said, and made for the door.

He was still at his desk. Still busy with his preparations and his papers.

He looked up in surprise as she entered, and half rose. Dinah offered no introductory explanation.

"Joyce may want a woman pal," she said; "I am going with you."

His face worked with emotion, as he grasped her hand speechlessly.

And in the pause that followed, it was as though all the lonely far-off women had heard—and back across the world came the echo of her own cry:

"WELL PLAYED!"

CHAPTER XXXII

IN WHICH TWO AWAKE

It was about three days later that Ted Burnett came over with his news. Joyce was up for the first time since the terrible night, and lying on a sofa on the verandah; but she still looked as if a puff of wind would blow her away.

She watched Burnett coming towards her with a veiled question in her eyes, but he pretended not to see it. He had brought some birds for her which he had shot in the morning, and two or three books that he had bought for her in town. She smiled as she thanked him, but it was a smile that hurt like a sob.

"I've brought some pleasant news," he said. "Who do you think is coming to stay with me?"

She waited silently, and he went on: "Actually your old friend the doctor! I expect he has broken down in health again. He's always overworking himself. He sent me a cable: 'Coming to see you immediately.' I'm awfully glad. I love having the good old doctor with me."

While he spoke, slowly into Joyce's cheeks came a bright red spot, and then vanished again, leaving her more deathly pale than ever.

She made no comment, but Burnett was not without his own conclusions, though he was at a loss to know how any message had been sent to the doctor.

He only stayed talking a few minutes, as she was evidently too ill to listen, but his manner was just as gentle and kind and brimming over with sympathy as Jim's.

"Try to get well," he said, very gently, as he rose to leave her; "we should all feel it so dreadfully if you didn't."

But again she only smiled the smile that hurt.

He went down on the lands to look for Oswald, and found him hard at work as usual, though looking utterly woebegone. He told him at once about the doctor's visit, and Oswald expressed no surprise, merely remarking that it must be nice to be able to throw up one's work at a moment's notice, if one felt off colour or anything.

"Perhaps he will be able to do something for Mrs. Grant," Burnett suggested; "she looks dreadfully ill. Do you think it is wise to let her stay out here just now at all?"

"I can't do anything with her," in rather a hurt voice. "She won't hear of going to Lady Marsland, who most kindly invited her at once, and she doesn't want to see a doctor."

"She'll need to go home to England as soon as it can be arranged, I expect?" Burnett remarked, to sound him.

Oswald looked more worried than ever. "I don't see how it is to be done," he said; "it would cost at least a hundred and fifty pounds with the return journey, and I can't spare it at present."

"Still, if she continues such an invalid——" he persisted.

"I don't think she will for long, she's perfectly strong naturally, and has a good constitution to fall back on. It's the shock that has knocked her to pieces. It has me as well. I don't feel fit to do anything but lie on a sofa myself, but the work has to be done."

"It is much better to be occupied if one possibly can, at such a time. I'm afraid lying on a sofa alone, brooding over her trouble, is the worst thing Mrs. Grant can do."

He stuck to his point, because he scented developments

that might almost be tragic, and he wanted to give this man his chance if possible. He wanted to take him by the shoulder and shake him into something more after the semblance of a man, capable of holding his own. It was so palpable that he never would shut the stable door till the horse had gone, unless it was possible to shake him into it. The farm and his work and the future of both were so ingrained into his entire consciousness, that he seemed unable to see a yard beyond them, or to realize that while he gave himself blindly up to them, an enemy might be coming from quite a different direction. He wanted to give him a good shaking and say: "For Heaven's sake put your wife before the farm for once if you want to keep her! What will be the good of your paltry hundred and fifty pounds saved, if she has either died or left you?"

He tried once more.

"If it's only a question of money, it would be the greatest pleasure to me to lend you whatever sum you need. I happen to have rather a larger balance than usual just now, and it's lying doing nothing at the bank. You might just as well have the use of it."

Oswald did not even look up. "I never borrow," he said coldly. "It is very kind of you to think of it, but it is quite out of the question."

Burnett made no rejoinder, but under his breath he muttered: "Damn fool—he deserves to lose her!"

He stayed a little longer, trying to cheer him up for the sake of the white-faced sufferer on the veranda, but felt he was making no headway. He went away, unaccountably depressed himself. If the husband wore that gloomy, morose, ill-used air in the house, what was ever to instil the wife with the necessary courage to try and get well and go on as before? Not that Joyce was wanting in courage, but he felt instinctively that she was played out now; and what courage she had would likely enough lead her in another direction than enduring the only existence this man offered her. No doubt he was fearfully cut up himself, but Burnett had instinctively manly views upon the claims of the weak sex upon the strong, and he would always blame the man if possible. He felt that, simply because he *was* a man, Oswald ought to give his every thought and action to supporting her now, and helping her to win through. And he knew it

was hopeless. As he rode home through the waving mealies, he could only view the future with alarm. Evidently all he could rise to by way of support was Lady Marsland, to whom he must know Joyce had only an antipathy. The anxiety hung about him as he smoked a solitary pipe on his verandah in the starlight. 'What in the world could Lawson be thinking of to fling all caution to the winds like this? Surely he did not intend to imperil his career?' He watched the stars and puzzled steadily, until his thoughts gradually drifted to Dinah. He had heard nothing of her for some time, except some information he gleaned from Beauty that had not been of a nature to cheer him. Major Egerton was evidently making the most of his chances, and Burnett was afraid he also meant business. Ever since Beauty had told him, he had been restless and ill at ease. He had been feeding himself with the notion that if she wanted him she would tell him, and that, if she cared for him enough to marry him, she ought not to be afraid of life among the kopjes. But something about Joyce's forlornness made him see a little differently. There were times when a woman so badly needed another woman, however strong she was—perhaps it wasn't altogether fair to ask a girl to come out to that loneliness and isolation for a man's sake. And if it were so? If Dinah's love were equal to anything else within reason? Did he really care more for those acres of mealies, and his shooting, and the kopjes, than for her?

He knew she had liked him especially; she had admitted as much. Wasn't he perhaps something of a crass idiot to sit quietly down there and let the Major walk in and carry her off?

The thought grew and grew—striking wider and deeper. Why in the world should he expect her to do all the giving up, if giving up had to be done? Why couldn't he meet her half way, if she could be persuaded to relinquish her liberty that far? With their joint income he could perfectly well take a post in England, and still visit his beloved Southern Cross, this time with her—for he knew well enough she would love to come and rough it with him, if she knew she was not compelled to stay.

He began more and more to suspect himself a fool. After all, what was it all without her? Ever since she went the country had lessened its hold of him, hiding its

former smile behind the longing for her. And meanwhile he had sat tamely down and let the Major walk into the breach. Even supposing he still felt she ought to be willing to face the life if she loved him enough to marry him, that was hardly the way to win such love. Surely the least he could do was to prove the reality and depth of *his* love by being ready to make a big sacrifice for her. He got up and walked restlessly about the verandah; and all the time the new aspect gained ground. Before he went to bed his decision was made. He would find a manager for his farm or sell it, and go home with Cecil Lawson to try again. And if she would listen to him at home, well—the kopjes might call. Anything seemed better now than life without Dinah, if he could possibly win her. He wished the doctor were not coming. He would have started the very next week, but for that tiresome cable. How awkward it was—and how hard, just when he had discovered his own folly! Still, one must never fail a pal, even for love, and he must just go on as patiently as he could, until he had seen the doctor and heard his plans.

The evening he made his decision, by a strange coincidence, was the two voyagers' first on board. The big Union Castle steamer was dropping down the Channel bound for the South, and the doctor and Dinah were standing together in the forepart gazing straight ahead.

Neither spoke much; there was little to say, and each was occupied with their separate thoughts.

Dinah, for her part, was astonished at her own calm, mingled unmistakably with a growing sense of subdued elation. It was as though she had been roving restlessly in a maze for months, and now had suddenly found the way out.

The Field-Marshal was quite forgotten—everything was forgotten—except that the ship's course lay South. The wonder of her own mood held her spellbound.

It was so impossible! . . . so incredible! . . . yet so absolutely certain that she felt only subdued elation, and that restful sense of a way out. Finally, impossible or not, beyond all doubt, Rhodesia beckoned.

Beckoned! nay, *called*—called in her blood, called in her heart, called in her brain.

She wanted Rhodesia—wanted the kopjes and the

vleis and the sunshine. Wanted the free, untrammelled vigorous life; was in haste to get back to the monotony and sameness.

Oh, was he waiting, was he really waiting for her?—on the verandah perhaps, all alone, smoking his pipe and watching the stars. And she was coming to him, and he did not know it.

Ploughing through the waves just as fast as ever the steamer could go, heading—heading—for the South.

Under the Southern Cross they would plight their troth, while the kopjes mounted guard all round. Under the Southern Cross they would step together over the threshold into the wonderland of Love.

But perhaps he had changed? Met some one else—wearied of her silence—weighed her in the balance and found her wanting.

Dinah's heart laughed.

Ah, no, no! Men of Ted Burnett's type did not change, did not weary, did not probe—they *loved*. She knew just how it would be. There would be no protestations, no flowery speeches, no passionate promises. He would just stand very straight and square and strong, and look steadily into her face—and she—she would laugh; she was bound to laugh—if anything touched Dinah to the very bottom of her soul she had to either laugh—or cry.

Every moment the wonder grew. Marvel that she had not found it out before! Was it not her own best creed made manifest? No parading of virtues, no delving for reasons—no pros and cons at all—just Ted Burnett and the kopjes calling—calling—and she hastening—free and splendid with the rest at last, because she was *giving*.

That he should give up his farm never entered her head. Why should he? He loved it, and she would love it too. They would cure the bacon together and experiment on each other with his mother's recipes! She smiled when she thought of his mother. How she would love her too! She did already, for they had met several times again, and, though Dinah had persisted in pretending that she and the beloved son were deadly enemies, it was quite impossible not to love the son's mother. She believed the news would gladden her inexpressibly. How they would laugh some day when

she and Ted went home, and she would protest they were deadly enemies still!

If only the ship would go a little faster! Everything was too calm and quiet and solemn, when her lover was waiting, and she hastening over the sea to him.

She probed the doctor at last. "It's not going fast enough," she said. "Don't you long for a flying machine?"

He looked into her face questioningly and a little surprised.

She felt it, and laughed half-consciously. "It's so good to be going to see Billy again. You needn't have tried to thank me as you did. I'm feeling quite a fraud. I can't think why I ever went home."

The doctor looked again over the heaving water into the star-spangled silences. "If you and I are going to our fate, Dinah," he said, "I'm glad it's through such a restful, wonderful, star-lit night. Just to gaze at it makes one strong—strong to have and to hold, till death us do part."

Dinah felt a lump in her throat suddenly. How different must his Fate necessarily be from hers! Hers all sunshine, his unavoidably storm and stress, and much need for strength and brave enduring.

Oh, she would lend her strength too! She would be brave with him. For Joyce's sake and for his own sake, if it came to a crisis she would take her stand by them against the world.

Her elation passed into a quiet flow of gladness. What, after all, was anything, beside the giving of oneself! What better Kingdom of Heaven upon earth than to have found, at last, a channel in which her rich nature could pour its richness in unstinted giving!

It did not come very natural to Dinah to pray. The Deity, as a Being to besiege with petitions, did not appeal to her; but somehow, that night, she felt that her quiet gladness was both worship and a prayer, wholly acceptable to that Supreme Power whose highest and grandest attributes are surely Loving and Giving.

CHAPTER XXXIII

DINAH ARRIVES

It was not until they reached Capetown that Dinah wired her coming to Billy, and not unnaturally the telegram almost transfixed them with surprise.

Beauty spoke first :

"Bravo Dinah," he said, in a low voice, and the others looked their mutual agreement. For each knew without any questioning, that it was on Joyce's account she came.

When Jim got up to go out, he remarked from the doorway : "I think I'll just slip over and tell Mrs. Grant. She'll be so pleased to see Miss Webberley."

Billy was hunting for his tobacco, with his back to them. "Can you boss up the boys, Beauty?" he asked, without turning round; "I think I shall ride across and have tea with Burnett."

He found Burnett looking very seedy, with a touch of fever, which he said had been hanging about him for days. It was in reality the result of worry and restlessness. Having once made up his mind to go home, he was impatient to get away, and fretted over the delay caused by the doctor's visit. Yet he could not do other than wait for him.

"We've had a surprise," Billy told him, sitting down on the edge of the verandah, "who do you think is coming to see us?"

"What! Are you having a visitor again, too! Who is it?"

Billy leaned forward and commenced to busy himself trimming a creeper with his pocket-knife—which was rather impertinent of him, as it was neither his house, nor his verandah, nor his creeper :

"I had a wire from Dinah from Capetown, coolly announcing she's on her way up."

For a few moments Burnett made no sign. He sat very still, staring across the country before them, and Billy went on with his trimming. Of course, she was

coming back with Egerton—he might have known—and yet . . . anyhow, he must say something.

He cleared his throat and tried to speak naturally: "Is she coming as Mrs. Egerton?"

"Good Lord! what an idea!"

Billy nearly demolished the whole creeper by accident. "Not she. The Major is not in her line—they were only the best of pals. She's coming with your visitor, of course, on Mrs. Grant's account."

Burnett looked as if, what with fever and worry, he might faint. Certainly he was speechless. Billy glanced at the cuttings on the ground.

"Could you spare one of your ninety-nine house-boys to sweep up this mess, do you think?"

Burnett got up.

"Gad!" he said; "but there's some trumps in the world! How many boys do you want? and what the deuce have you been doing to my bougainvillæa? Would you like to trim a corner off the house while you're about it?"

"Umph! looks a bit of a mess, doesn't it? I've cut off more than I meant to. Never mind, let's have some tea and go for a short shoot!"

"I'd arranged to go home directly the doctor was provided for," Burnett told him later. "Walker was coming here to manage for me, until I decided whether I was going to sell or not."

"A jolly good thing you hadn't started then! I saw Mrs. Grant for a few minutes as I came past. Jove! she does look ill. It's a relief to think some one is coming."

"It's splendid of Miss Webberley," pouring out the tea, "but I'm afraid she'll be very shocked to see her. She's simply wasting away; and that fool, her husband, doesn't attempt to do anything."

"Not likely—why should he?" Billy poised pieces of bread on his pointer's nose; "she's only part of the stock. First he bought a farm, then some cattle, then a horse, then a wife! Ugh! I've no patience with him. She'd be game enough under ordinary circumstances not to go under now, but what can she do with that for a sole companion?"

"He was a grand little piccanin," Burnett said sadly; "I don't know when I've felt more upset. I miss him awfully whenever I go to the house."

"It's aged Jim. I never saw a chap so cut up. He didn't say anything, but he just looked awful, and for nights I heard him get up and go out for a walk because he couldn't sleep. Queer chap, Jim. He just idolized that kid. He never said much about it, but the moment the youngster saw him it sort of chuckled. Don't know much about babies myself—not in my line at all—but that was the best of its breed I've ever struck. Beastly to think of a kiddie like that dying. Just a little lump of happiness, and everything before it; and then suddenly nothing at all. So unnecessary to begin, if you're not to get any farther than that."

"I'm afraid it was long enough to do a good deal of mischief," significantly.

Billy got up, and began to put on his cartridge-belt.

"Long enough to mess up the whole show, I expect," was his laconic conclusion, as he signed to his boy to follow with his rifle, shouldering his gun himself.

When Jim told Joyce, she gave a little exclamation of astonishment.

"Dinah!" she said; "is Dinah really coming out again?"

"She's coming to see you, I expect. I'm so glad. She will help you to pick up and get well better than anyone, and probably arrange to take you home to England for a change."

Joyce only looked to the horizon with inscrutable eyes.

"She is very good," she said quietly. "It is just the sort of generous thing Dinah would do."

Jim watched her a little wistfully. He felt, though nothing had been said, that there were forces at work against which Joyce's friends would hurl themselves in vain.

Keenly sympathetic and far-seeing, he had not failed to note that in some way the old Joyce was gone, and an unfamiliar Joyce in her place. In every word and action she was exactly the same to him, with perhaps an added gentleness, but behind her eyes was ever a lurking mystery that made him feel a new Joyce looked out from their great depths. It was rather terrible. When she had at last broken down into a paroxysm of weeping, he had told himself she would gradually become rational, and after the first severity of the blow had passed, would

be her old self again. But now he felt he had not gauged her yet. Rational, or otherwise, she was not quite as other women. He knew, because Oswald had told him complainingly, that she had erased every reminder of the child from the house. She had given all his toys and clothes away, and, indeed, everything pertaining to him, sending almost all down to the two sturdy children at Mrs. Chaldecott's. Having done this, she lay and waited, with that inscrutable expression in her eyes, and ever that fragile, wasting appearance.

When Lady Marsland came out to see her, she had received her quite naturally and sweetly, but she had refused to talk of the child. The same with Mrs. Chaldecott. Indeed, she never spoke of him to anyone, except Jim himself, and very little to him.

After telling her about Dinah, Jim went home up the valley, feeling uneasy and depressed. He was not quite satisfied with his own share in sending the cable, yet he knew perfectly well that, in any case, it would have gone. Joyce had asked him first because he was there, and he was her greatest friend in the country. Had he demurred he would have failed her to no purpose, for somehow or other it would have been sent. Moreover, was he sorry that it had gone? Even if his fears became realized, would he be sorry that it were so? He believed he would. He cared for Joyce like a young sister, and he knew he would feel it bitterly if a sister of his did what Joyce was probably contemplating. Yet he felt that if he were the doctor he would have answered her call, and have believed himself justified in doing so. It was all very perplexing. Why, if a thing was hateful in a sister, should it not be equally hateful in some one else? Was it possible that in the first case the unkind criticisms that would hit home through kinship moulded his thought? Or was it in reality a greater love, and therefore a greater abhorrence of a feared wrong step? He was half inclined to think that it was the former, for he was not as fond of either of his sisters as of Joyce, and he believed he could easily forgive her what he could not forgive them. It did not seem quite fair and square, and he wondered if he ought to try and hate the thing more in Joyce. Not that it would be much good, for he did already hate the idea of her "whiteness" becoming sullied, and was yet vaguely conscious that not in the smallest degree would

it interfere with his affection for her, or his belief in her sweetness and purity.

He reached home feeling dimly that something was wrong somewhere, but he could not name it nor place it, and, right or wrong, he wanted Joyce to have the fair, fighting chance to get into line again, which she could not have on that lonely farm with a man of her husband's temperament. Perhaps a stronger woman could have untied the knot without cutting it, and no one's susceptibilities need have been hurt, but in Joyce's frail condition this appeared impossible. It had to be one thing or the other, unless, perhaps, Dinah could find a solution.

She, Dinah, arrived three days later, and they all hailed her with unmistakable delight. She came out from town in the morning, and in the afternoon Billy walked over to Killarney with her, leaving her in sight of the house to go on alone.

Joyce was lying in a room that opened on to the verandah with French windows, and Dinah went softly round to the front, unannounced, to look for her.

The pitifulness of it all smote her more intensely than ever, and she wondered how she would get through the interview. Then she stood between the open doors a moment and looked at the new Joyce. And suddenly all her sympathy and sorrow overflowed, and she just hurried across the room to her, and, sinking on her knees by the sofa, burst into tears.

"Oh, you poor little soul!" she said, using Jim's very words; "you poor little soul!"

Big tears gathered in Joyce's eyes also, and fell softly, but she said nothing.

When Dinah was calmer she looked up, and taking Joyce's hands in both hers, said: "You're just letting it break your heart, Joyce, but you mustn't, you mustn't—think of some of us——"

"You didn't see him as he was at the last, Dinah. I—I daren't think."

"Jim has been telling me, and I had the picture you sent me; and then, of course, I knew he would grow as beautiful as an angel. He was so exactly like you. But, Joyce, it isn't brave just to give way altogether and go under. It isn't like you."

"Yes it is." She looked past Dinah to the far blue hills. "I can't explain, Dinah, but it is quite natural."

The part of me that used to be brave died with my little one. You mustn't mind about it. It's no use. It's best to try and not mind about anything, but just go where the flood bears you. I used to think so before Baby came, and then everything changed for a little." Her voice broke, and she continued with difficulty: "I felt Life did mean to try and be good to me, and help me to win through, and it grew easier every day with Baby; but afterwards—— I can't explain, Dinah. Life didn't really care, she's only been playing with me, and then nothing was any more worth while."

"You poor little soul!" Dinah reiterated. "I can't tell you what I felt when I got the doctor's telegram. I couldn't see for a moment. Everything was a colourless blank. Then I put on my hat and went straight to him."

Joyce flushed under the keen eyes, but made no comment. "He had made up his mind already, Joyce. It was splendid. It moved me more than anything has done for a long time. It was just as if there was nothing in all the world but you and your trouble."

Again Joyce's eyes swam with tears, but she only looked away to the distance in silence.

"I didn't mean to come when I left him. I I didn't altogether want to, but afterwards—— Anyhow, I'm thankful I came now. You must let me try and help you, Joyce. I can't do much. I don't suppose anyone could, but it's nice sometimes to feel there's someone near who cares dreadfully—isn't it? And you don't know how I loved that kiddie. The doctor and I were always talking of him."

"You are so good. I can never, never thank you." Joyce pressed Dinah's hand in hers.

"I'm tiring you too much," and Dinah got up suddenly. "I'm just going to see what you've got in the house that an invalid might fancy to eat. I expect you're toying with horrid tinned things, and, in reality, eating nothing at all. See I be quite still and rest a little, while I see to things; and then I'll sit and talk to you quietly for a time. I want to tell you all about Beauty, and his dear little Brown Mouse," and she got up, pretending not to notice how ill and exhausted Joyce looked. "You ought to have a glass of port wine in the afternoon. Is there any . . ."

"Yes. Oswald got some yesterday; but I don't want it, Dinah."

Dinah smiled softly.

"I'm afraid that's the last thing that matters," she said, as she moved away to get some.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CONCERNING LOVE AND BACON

WHEN the doctor paid his first visit to Joyce, Burnett walked over with him, and Dinah met them there.

"We won't go in with you," she said. "Joyce is scarcely equal to three callers at once. Captain Burnett and I will entertain each other outside for a little while, and then I shall go home."

She had greeted Burnett quite casually, turning the subject at once to Joyce, and he could only listen sympathetically. Then they wandered away together to a little rocky knoll, and sat down on a rustic garden-seat, from whence they could see the lean, stooping figure of Oswald Grant, absorbed as usual in his mealies and potatoes.

And Ted felt that it was indeed as he had surmised, concerning Joyce and the doctor. Nothing had passed between him and Cecil Lawson of a confidential nature, but he had seen instantly on the doctor's grave, clever face that look of resolve and steadfast determination that he knew of old. When Cecil Lawson wore that expression he had passed the point where remonstrance was of the smallest avail. He would carry out whatever purpose he had in his mind, and no one could thwart him. So Ted Burnett looked a little graver than usual himself, and—waited. The horse was neglected, and the stable door wide open, while the owner, priding himself overbearingly on his wonderful industry and unswerving attention to his work, toiled gloomily on, fretting over dangers past, and dangers that *might* come, while the only danger that he really need have feared was at his very door in the present, and he could not see it.

According to some codes, Burnett ought to have befriended his neighbour, and closed the door for him. He had, in fact, considered the claim. But in the end he

was overborne by the thought that Joyce was his neighbour also; and if the horse in the stable is fainting with thirst while the owner is too busy to bring it water, small blame if it go in search of healing for itself.

He had given his warning, and he had tried to make it urgent; now he waited.

In the meantime there was Dinah.

How good it was to see her again! How he loved the clear, ringing tones of her voice, the bright, unaffected laugh, the neat, smart, compact nature of her whole appearance. True she had scarcely looked into his face, over their greeting, giving all her attention to the doctor, but for the present he was satisfied to make sure that she had indeed come and that she was really there.

But after they had sat down on the garden-seat, where they had often sat of old, he noticed that she was not quite her natural self. She was talking fast with heightened colour, and she avoided meeting his eyes. Moreover, she was not talking well. Her sentences were disjointed, and her subjects forced; yet it was so good to hear her talk at all that he felt he would like to go on as they were indefinitely. Presently, however, she grew restless. "Let us go down and see Mr. Grant," she said; "I missed him when I was here yesterday."

She got up, and very reluctantly Burnett did the same, following her down the steep path to the tall, stooping figure in the distance.

"We left Dr. Lawson talking to Joyce," she said, "and came for a stroll. How are you? I was sorry to miss you yesterday."

He told her that he was worked off his feet as usual. The damp had somehow got into the forage-shed, and now if it were not all brought out and dried, it would be spoilt.

"It means an endless amount of quite unnecessary work," he grumbled.

"But how could it have got damp if it was put in dry?" she asked artlessly, and Burnett's lips twitched under his moustache.

"I suppose some of these fools of niggers put a few bundles in damp. It is just the sort of silly thing they would do. Anyhow, I must turn the whole lot out. I shall have to get you to excuse my coming up to tea, as I want to try and finish to-night."

They moved away presently, and where the path turned up the valley to The Knoll, Dinah said she thought she would go home.

"Joyce will be too tired to see us to-day, and I shall be coming again to-morrow."

He moved along beside her, strangely silent. Now that the longed-for moment had come, he feared to speak of what was in his heart lest it only meant the end.

Dinah chatted on at first, in the same slightly forced, disjointed manner; but finally she, too, grew rather silent.

Then Burnett took his chance with both hands.

"If I had not received the doctor's cable," he told her, "I should have been on my way home by now."

She started, almost imperceptibly, and as he waited, asked:

"Why? What were you going home for? How could you bear to be away from your beloved farm? Who was going to take care of the dear soil and kopjes for you?"

"I had arranged with a man to act as manager until I let him know if I was going to sell it or not."

"Sell it! Really, Captain Burnett!" seeking to hide her surprise in a little laugh, "I shall begin to wonder if you are suffering from sunstroke?"

He smiled, looking straight ahead. Since he had dived into the subject filling his whole mind, it was noticeable that he gathered courage, and a certain quiet steadfastness as he went on. As for Dinah, she knew in a flash that it was *the* moment. In a few seconds he had become just what she had pictured him—straight, and square, and strong, with steady eyes.

She felt a little unnerved, but waited.

"Whether I sold it or not depended upon you," he told her. "I was coming home to tell you that even this life out here had lost all its savour without you; and that I would a thousand times rather give it all up for ever than be without you, if you would come to me. I don't mind whether it is town or city or country any longer, so long as you are there."

Dinah laughed—a queer little laugh with a break in it—chiefly to keep herself from doing anything more foolish.

"Oh!—what a pity you engaged a manager!" she said.

She saw him bite his moustache suddenly.

"If you mean that my errand would only have been a vain one, it doesn't make any difference. I don't care to stay on here now. When the doctor goes, I shall try another country, if—if—you mean that my errand would have been a vain one."

"No, that isn't what I meant; but I'm rather vexed about the manager. Can you cancel his agreement?" She was looking away from him, hiding her eyes.

"But why should I?" in a slightly puzzled tone.

"I only thought he'd be rather in the way——"

She turned to him, and there was suddenly a vague mistiness about her eyes.

"Do say something absolutely idiotic, Ted—I know I shall make a fool of myself in about two seconds, and begin to cry."

"Do you mean——" he began. "Oh, Dinah . . . is it possible?"

"That's not nearly idiotic enough—of course it's possible. It's been possible all along."

For answer he caught her hands in his—those strong, shapely hands, and held them fast.

"I don't feel as if I could believe it all at once," struggling to hide how deeply he was moved.

"I shouldn't try," laughingly, in an effort to calm her own throbbing nerves. "Let's begin by deciding which pig to kill for the next curing, and whether we'll use spice, or no spice. Your mother says——"

He stopped her summarily, and when he was free to speak again, said: "We'll leave the pigs now, Dinah, and let someone else do the curing always. I shall easily get something to do at home. My plans are all made, and wanting only your consent."

"Then you can just begin to unmake them all again for I said we'll cure bacon, and cure bacon we will. My poor boy, you're as good as married to a shrew already. A fig for your plans. I've been aching for the kopjes, and the mealies, and the freedom ever since I went away, only I was in such a funk, I daren't acknowledge it even to myself."

"No," as he attempted to expostulate. "It's too late to back out of it now. I'm going to marry you, and

the ceremony is going to take place in Salisbury, and we will spend our honeymoon on the farm; and it's going to last——" Her voice broke a little again, and she brushed her hand hastily across her eyes. "Ted—as if I could do *anything* but *love* Rhodesia—since we found each other here!"

Again he imprisoned her hands and drew her close to him. "Dinah, I love you," he said simply. "Oh, how I love you!"

She was afraid to be serious, because of that growing mistiness.

"Your folly in that respect is the only thing I can't reconcile with all your other splendid qualities. Come along—let's go and lay a wager with Billy that his bacon won't be in the same street as ours; nor his mealies, nor his forage, nor his potatoes, and carrots, and cabbages, and dogs, and cats, and foals, and calves, and goslings, and all the other silly things. We'll take it in turns to experiment on each other with your mother's recipes though. Fair do's, mind! As a matter of fact, it is she I fell in love with. I forgot to mention that. I told her you and I hated each other. She'll nearly have a fit when she hears we are married. Ted—what a dear she is! Fancy getting a mother like that thrown in!" And she rattled on all the way up the kopje to the house where Billy waited.

CHAPTER XXXV

A BENEDICTION

MEANWHILE in the sitting-room of the little red brick bungalow, with its French windows opening on to the deep verandah, Joyce lay watching for the man whose coming and going in her life had been almost as the swift and sudden flight of a bird—coming as it were out of a void, and passing again back to a scene of action and environment wholly unknown to her. Strange that she was not afraid—that on her sofa she lay quite still, beyond misgivings and beyond doubt. Was it that the eternal hunger for her little one had left her small room for hopes and fears? Was it that the shock and anguish had numbed her power to feel? Or was it that, though the coming

and going had been so swift and silent, there had been, and was, a strength of personality in each, strong enough at this supreme moment to step outside all feebleness, even the most natural and human nervousness? Certainly, as she lay waiting with her beautiful eyes towards the open door, there was no shadow of shrinking nor turning.

All around, outside, as an invisible curtain, hung the Rhodesian silence. No sound of beast or bird broke that oppressive hush—no sign of life rested the eye with a sense of fellowship afar. Below the verandah, at the foot of the steep kopje side, was a stretch of land desolated with dried and broken mealie stalks—refuse waiting to be burnt. Beyond that another kopje rose abruptly, its barren sides studded only with sparse grass, rocky boulders, and stunted trees. From where Joyce lay, it was this barrenness only that was visible; but it hurt her no longer. The day had mercifully gone by, when, in her young eagerness she reached out longing arms for life and laughter, to strike only the rocky sides of the pitilessly cramped horizon that bound her.

To the right of the barren kopje, however, there lay a long valley in the sunlight, draped in exquisite lights and shadows, threaded by the clustering line of foliage beneath which the little river was still laughing in its sleeve, and terminating in mystical blue kopjes, whose bare sides were draped in shadowy veils of purple gauze.

It was, in truth, a view at which strangers gazed enchanted, and several times had Joyce listened silently to congratulations on the beautiful situation of her home. Mutely she had acquiesced, neither affirming nor denying. How should these visitors, who came and went, understand the underlying *deadness* that, in spite of her efforts, gripped her heart. How should they know that the beauty was the lifeless, monotonous beauty, of the lovely woman who has no soul?—they, in the midst of strenuous lives, seeing a vision of restfulness, with exquisite lights and shades in a dreaming silence: she in a more or less silent, changeless existence, seeing always the same picture, with the same expression—the same numbing soundlessness.

To such a child of Nature, the ceaseless, restless murmur of the sea was companionship untold compared to those lifeless valleys, nearly always void of songsters, void of flowers, void of verdure. Sheep-trimmed downs, and buttercup meadows, and country tree-shaded lanes were

things to dream of as in some far heaven, beside the face of a land knowing only kopje and veldt, and passionless horizons, and untrodden solitudes, that appalled. Others might love them, and come back again and again, from the lap of luxury itself, unable to resist the call of the veldt—but surely they were always strong, and robust, and invulnerable to the heat and lassitude.

It seemed to Joyce that she had been only tired ever since she came—tired with a weariness of heart, and soul, and life that folded itself round her being, and numbed the faculties with which she would gladly enough have made a braver fight. Perhaps if she had not been so tired—but what of it now?—as she lay waiting in the little sitting-room, with its French window opening on the verandah.

And then he came.

She saw the long shadow in the sunlight—the sudden darkening of the light—the steadfast, pitying eyes looking with their long weight of restrained, unspoken love into hers.

A rush of colour dyed her cheeks, A nervous, questioning light gleamed fitfully in her eyes for one swift moment, followed by a quiet joy that never again quite left them, while the old loved tones said simply: "I have come."

Cecil felt afterwards that he had never quite known before how beautiful she was. Or was it perhaps that never before had he dared to let himself realize it all? Now she was his, and he had come for her. Though there was much to be said before he would even allow himself the bliss of their first kiss, yet in his heart of hearts he knew the small, frail, exquisite face and form were his alone. It seemed vaguely as if they had been his from all time. Surely that old student life, and the following years of work and success before he knew her were nothing—were a dream. His real life of heart had begun a year ago, when, after his difficult ride through the dark, he had brought her back from the very gate of death to reign in his life for ever.

Later on Dinah gathered from him how he had not permitted her to make any decision without satisfying himself that she really knew what she was doing, and that, as far as he could, he had tried to suppress his own

personality and leave her an unbiased choice. She also gleaned that, beyond satisfying his own sense of what was due to Joyce, he might have saved himself the trouble. Joyce had not paid much heed, because her mind was made up long before he arrived.

She had apparently put her little wasted hand in his strong one, and said with simple trustfulness: "I will go home with you."

This, he explained to Dinah, was after he had fully persuaded her that he was more than ready to take her, no matter what the cost to himself.

There was something else that he did not tell. He did not tell her how, finally, after the last word was said and the die cast, he had gathered her in his arms with ineffable tenderness and held her against his heart for a few heavenly moments while he kissed her for the first time. Nor how, then, he had laid her down again on the sofa, and, leaning over her, breathed, in a low, distinct voice:

"The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught save death part thee and me."

Lastly, very softly, he had kissed her forehead.

"That, my little one, is a benediction," he had said, and left her.

And in the doctor's strong heart from that moment Joyce was as entirely his as any marriage service could have made her; and no vow uttered in cloistered walls with priest, and choir, and altar, could have been to him more binding than the simple, noble sentence—and the kiss that was a benediction.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE DEPARTURE

AFTER that, the die being cast, events appeared to fall in line of themselves. It was perfectly natural for Dinah to take Joyce to stay a week or two in town for a change. It was perfectly natural for Burnett and the doctor to be almost constantly in town also, as Burnett was very busy renovating the whole of his house for his bride. He did not mean to let her stay out there many months.

but so determined was she to begin on his farm, that he could only acquiesce, and set about making it as dainty and comfortable as possible. Billy and Beauty came in often also, each with unlimited advice to offer, needless to say, of a wholly fatuous and impossible nature. Billy's was plentifully sprinkled with expressions of the deepest sympathy for the prospective bridegroom.

"Why don't you run, man!" he exclaimed once. "Run—run—run, to the ends of the earth. It's the only way to escape it. That, or to get certified insane. Matrimony's the very devil—when you can have a jolly farm and mealies and things without it."

For which he would get his head smacked by Dinah, and further protest against his dearest friend falling into the clutches of a wife who would most certainly turn out a husband-beater.

Only Jim stayed away. Day by day he went about his work more silently and gravely than was his wont, oppressed unspeakably by the enigma of life. Hitherto he had thought little enough about its subtler shades. Square, and sturdy, and transparently sincere, he had followed his own serene course unswervingly; carelessly ignoring the smaller knots of circumstances, to come suddenly through his affection for Joyce and her baby upon a Master Knot.

Look where he would, think as he liked, her circumstances, and what it was fair to expect of her, baffled him. His own exceeding love for the dead child, and undisguised contempt for the child's father, only entangled him further in the bewildering maze. He was not in love with Joyce in the ordinary acceptation of the word; to him she had always seemed as some rare, delicate, exotic flower, blooming above him; yet, as he had proved when he went out that dark night to fetch the doctor, his affection was such that there was almost nothing he would not do for her.

And still this coming possibility hung over him like a sword.

To his simple, loyal heart the thought continued intolerable, that his fair flower should be brought low, that her whiteness should be sullied. The only thing that comforted him was that growing belief that this sullyng existed chiefly in his imagination. He could not explain the belief, nor account for it, but it was unmistakably

there. Deep in his heart he knew that Joyce was one of those fine souls who could do this thing and be none the less pure. In some mysterious way it even deepened his sympathy with her, the sympathy that had been from the beginning. Ever since she came to that land with Oswald Grant, except for that brief joy with her child, he knew that she had been fighting with her back against the wall. He knew that it had been both a brave and a plucky fight.

The cruel thing was that she ever came; and that, having come, she could only get away again branded in the eyes of the world with the stain of the faithless wife.

And then he thought of the two men involved. The one, her husband, from whom she had a right to expect every tenderness, every self-denying kindness, every support, had given her little else but the food and lodging which the veriest housekeeper is entitled to. The other, upon whom she had no claim whatever, laid his very career itself at her feet.

Going about his daily occupations, with the intensely blue rain-washed skies overhead, Jim wondered and puzzled, and got no further. Perhaps, by and by, a more enlightened race would solve such difficulties. He had no solution to offer. He was only absolutely and entirely convinced that, whatever the world said, Joyce was at heart as pure as he would have his own sister, and Cecil Lawson something of a hero, because he was ready to lose all for Love's sake. All the rest was mystery—

"The Master Knot of Human Fate."

It was when Dinah was away that they went. It had been purposely planned so. She often rode out to Ted Burnett's farm to review the progress of the preparations, and Joyce easily contrived to make it fall out that she should go on the day that the mail train left.

The doctor had already come in to the hotel for a day or two, so he had only to call and fetch her. Neither were well known, and easily escaped comment.

They just went quietly to the station with their meagre luggage, which included the little fox-terrier the baby had loved, and the mail train bore them away to the new day.

Joyce left two notes—one for Dinah, and one for her husband.

Dinah's ran :--

" DEAREST DINAH,

" When you come back we shall have gone. We arranged it for to-day while you were away, so that you should be as little implicated as possible. I know you will try to understand and not love me less. I would have fought against it if I had any fight left—but now I'm too tired. I only want love and rest for a little while before the end. It is as nearly perfect happiness as any left could be, to belong to Cecil. He will take me to London and find a home for me until everything is settled, and then we shall be married. He is writing to Captain Burnett himself. We love to talk of your great happiness, and we speak often of my little child.

" Please see that the other note is delivered; and please give my love to Jim, as I could not see him to say good-bye. I don't know how to thank you, but we shall always love you better than anyone else except each other.

" Yours, always lovingly,

" JOYCE.

" P.S.—I am taking Kim with me."

When Dinah went into the empty sitting-room of the little furnished house she and Joyce had occupied, and saw the two notes, she knew instantly what had happened.

" They've gone," she said quietly to Ted, and stood looking at the notes.

" Surely not!" was his exclamation.

Then Dinah opened the envelope addressed to her and read the letter, after which she handed it to him, and stood silently gazing out of the window, with tears in her eyes.

" Poor little Joyce!" she breathed softly. " Poor little thing, to have no other way out!"

" It will ruin Lawson's career," was the man's more matter-of-fact comment.

" He had counted that." She turned to him suddenly. " Ted, I don't care what anyone says, Cecil Lawson is a hero. The world can fling as much mud at him as it likes, but it can't make him less one. I hope

you don't mind, but I'm going to stand by them through thick and thin."

"Mind!" he echoed, taking her in his arms. "Di, you could not be your own dear self and do anything else."

"How dear of you!" dabbing her eyes. "Some men would be horrid about it, and one couldn't altogether blame them. I do hope Billy will be reasonable."

"I think so; I believe he was expecting it. Don't cry, sweetheart. It may have the happy-ever-after ending yet. Anyhow, she wouldn't have lived long if she had stayed out here with Oswald Grant."

Dinah dried her eyes and turned her attention to what should be done next, and decided to keep the second note back for a day.

"I wonder where in the world he will take her when they reach England?" was her next anxious question. "It will be very difficult for him to find a suitable place for her. She isn't fit to be alone. What can he do?" She worried over it for some time, until suddenly a light broke over her face, and she exclaimed: "Oh, what a splendid idea! Ted, I've got such a splendid idea!"

The long and short of which was that a telegram reached the doctor at Capetown, running:

"Take her to Miss Maitland, Hampstead. Will do anything for me. Am cabling her to expect you; explanation following."

CHAPTER XXXVII

VENGEANCE

It would be difficult to say what, in the first horrible moment of awakening, hit Oswald Grant the hardest. Certainly it was not wounded love. Wounded pride, wounded faith in the God of the Righteous, withering scorn of the weaker sex, passionate protest that such a calamity could have come to him, all struggled together like so many fiends trying at once to strangle him.

The note reached him in the evening, just as he was finishing his dinner, and he opened it heedlessly, sup-

posing Joyce wanted some garment or other she had forgotten.

What he read struck him dumb. His mind, at first, entirely refused to comprehend it. Then he became aware that the bearer of the note, a silent nigger, stood waiting.

"Get out," he said furiously, and before the expression on his face the nigger fled.

Then he stamped across the room, and came back to the fireplace, where his favourite pointer lay watching him anxiously.

"Get out," he blazed again; "taking up all the room," and kicked the dog, so that it gave a little sharp whine, and slunk away.

Finally he re-read the note:

"DEAR OSWALD" (it ran),

"When you receive this I shall be on my way to Capetown with Dr. Lawson. I am sorry to have brought you unhappiness, but you never really loved me, and it has all been a mistake. If Baby had not died, I would never have said so, but now it does not seem to matter. I hope you will divorce me as quickly as possible, so that we can be married without avoidable delay, and that before long you will be very happy with a better woman than I. I can only say again that I am sorry for everything.
"JOYCE."

A dreadful night followed—a night of cursing, and complaining, and invoking of ills unspeakable upon the heads of the two who had wronged him. He was no longer a man. He was more like a fiend—unreasonable, vindictive, spiteful, full of helpless rage and fury. And through it all ran that continuous note of non-comprehension that it should have happened to him. This was the inconceivable thing of all others. He, the law-abiding, high-principled, strictly moral, invariably temperate, God-fearing man, flouted and dishonoured by the lawless, unprincipled Freethinker. Verily and indeed his God either mocked or slept.

First his child, whom he undoubtedly loved, then his wife, whom he had certainly imagined he loved.

It was cruel beyond all endurance—beyond all reason. For no fault of his, his whole life suddenly blasted and

swept bare. He could see no future light nor possibility of light. He could never hold up his head among his fellows again, and his proud name, that darling of his heart, was dragged in the mud.

Well, she should never hold hers up either—he would at least glean what satisfaction he could out of awarding her her just punishment.

It was with this bleak comfort in his mind that he rode to town to interview Dinah.

She was expecting him, and she waited alone. Ted, who had remained overnight at the hotel, begged her to let him stay, but it was her most firm and decisive will to face the outraged husband unsupported, and he finally rode away to his farm after arranging for her to return to The Knoll in the afternoon.

"He has a right to be angry, and to vent it on someone," she said; "I am quite the best culprit under the circumstances, and I am determined to tell him a few home truths, which you might prevent if you were present."

Yet as she waited through the morning she could not help being much struck by the general peacefulness with which the whole thing had passed off. There had been no hitch anywhere. It might have been a most commonplace love match and wedding. Her fears for the doctor began to die away. Why should there be a scandal? The notices in the papers could only be short, and as soon as possible he and Joyce would be quietly married, and the circumstances would soon be forgotten. Joyce herself, being so lovely, and lovable, would greatly aid matters, and, as Ted had said, it might easily be the happy-ever-after ending yet.

She wondered why the doctor had so frankly spoken of the possibly penalty of a broken moral law. Wasn't it enough that he had willingly risked so much, and that Joyce had fought through so many wretched months?

It seemed to Dinah that they had both earned a peaceful happiness, and it was all so simple; she could not think why, at occasional past moments, she had had that strange transitory sense of tragedy in her thought of these two.

Then Oswald rode up with an expression she had never seen on his face before, and hoped never to see on any man's again, and after throwing his bridle rein to a nigger, stalked up the little path into the house. She waited for

him, standing very upright, on the hearth-rug, and let him have the first word.

"A nice mess you've made of things," he began with a bitter sneer; "I should have thought a *nice* woman (with an untellable inflection on the adjective) could have found something better to occupy her time than hunting round the world for a husband, and ruining a home or two for pastime by the way. I don't know how you answer to yourself for it, but I shouldn't like to have your account to settle at the last day."

Dinah bit her lip, but restrained herself, and let him go on.

"Till you came—you and that cursed doctor—Joyce was a woman to be proud of—a woman after any man's heart—one of the very few left unspoilt by modern notions, and therefore worth marrying. What is she now? What have you two made of her, with your cursed meddling?"

"We've given her a little real happiness, I hope."

"Real happiness!" the sneer deepening. "If I know Joyce at all, you've given her her death blow!" He changed his voice a little. "But why you should aim your wicked plots at me, I can't imagine. If you had taken a dislike to me, and wanted to see me miserable, wasn't it enough that I had lost my child? Was it necessary to take everything?"

For one moment Dinah's heart softened, and she felt a real qualm. After all, it did seem a cruel moment to forsake him, with that little image so fresh in his mind, and the loss so recent.

"You are mistaken in looking at it in the light of ill-will to yourself, or a plot, or anything of the kind," she said, speaking quietly. "I, personally, am very sorry for you, but I was still more sorry for Joyce, and she was old enough, and wise enough, to choose for herself. I neither helped nor hindered. If you failed to make her life with you endurable, surely she had a right to listen to her own heart and follow its bidding."

"Fiddlesticks! She had no right to listen to any counsel but mine. If she wasn't happy at Killarney, why didn't she say so, instead of doing nothing but mope and pine, as she has since the child died? In any case, what more did she want? Wasn't I true to her? Didn't I leave her to please herself from morning till night? Didn't I give her my name and protection when she was

a penniless, unknown orphan? And this is her gratitude! a true woman indeed! fickle, heartless, ungrateful, like all the rest of her sex. Well, she has shown no mercy to me, and I will show none to her. A harlot she chose to be, and a harlot she shall remain—they are well matched indeed"—the spite in his face made Dinah almost shiver—"a harlot and an atheist. I wish them joy of each other; for never, while I live, shall they have the right to marry."

Dinah blanched suddenly, and took a step forward. Then she pulled herself together sharply.

"That's nonsense. No man—no *gentleman*—could act in such a way."

"A man, and a gentleman, can act in such a way, and *will*," with cruel emphasis. "She is mine," bringing his hand down on the table with a thump, "and she shall stay mine. Before heaven and earth I refuse to release her. She did not choose to remain my honourable wife, so she shall remain instead another man's mistress."

Dinah's eyes blazed, and her cheeks flamed, but before she could speak he added, with studied insolence:

"That is not the way one usually speaks before a lady, but in my present company, it is probably very little out of place."

"You cur!" breathing hard; "you blackguard! To speak of Joyce in this way at all—and to me—only shows what you are. Man outwardly, perhaps, but a venomous serpent at heart, and a disgrace to your manhood. I love Joyce. Thank God she has at least got away from you!"

"Ah! I've hit you there, have I? . . . What about Joyce, then? To give her her due, she won't exactly glory in her new position, will she?"

Suddenly the horror of it gripped Dinah, and with a rush, for Joyce's sake, came the fighting instinct uppermost.

She drew a long breath; and then steadying her voice with an effort said: "You'll think better of it presently. I don't mind your personal insults. They're natural enough, I dare say, while you are feeling so sore. Perhaps it's a pity to say any more now. You'll see things differently by and by. You should try to remember that Joyce was intensely unhappy. If you had really cared for her you would have tried to make her happier, and she would have stood by you through thick and thin."

"Do you mean to infer that I neglected her? Pray, what does a woman expect more than she had? Wasn't I good to her? The very fact that your sympathy is with her only shows how misguided your own notions must be. There is only one deduction. I was faithful, and she was faithless. I wonder how many wives to-day can be as sure of the faithfulness of their husbands as she could of hers?"

Dinah lost hold a little.

"You! faithful!" in tones of scorn; "and pray, what temptation did you ever have to be anything else?" She took a step forward. "Put your hand on the table, Oswald Grant, and say if there was one moment in the whole of your life when you were ever tempted to be anything but faithful. It is time enough to parade your faithfulness when you have been under the fire of temptation, and come through unscathed. Until this last event your faithfulness could not even be compared with Joyce's. *For she had resisted.* Do you suppose they loved each other all in a moment, when the child died? Of course they didn't. For a whole long year the love has existed, and I dare stake my life on it that not one word passed from first to last, nor any single action, which might not have been heard and seen by the whole world. That is faithfulness. Remaining true as long as possible, when your heart and life are sick with longing. You are like all the rest of the good people, patting yourselves on the back, hugging your virtuous disposition, thanking God you are not as these—when you don't even know what it is to be tempted! Half of you aren't even capable of being tempted—you're such poor, trifling, faint-hearted things. Oh! I've no patience with you everyday, church-going saints, who crucify your fellow-creatures on the smallest pretext, with mocking and reviling, while you gather your garments round you and smirk over the front reserved seats you have so cleverly secured for yourselves in Heaven. When I think of it all I'm—I'm—positively sorry for God—you must so desperately try His patience! . . ." and she drummed loudly on the table with her fingers, struggling to regain her composure. "Everyone knows it takes a certain amount of grit and character to go wrong. Many a man who has fought valiantly against a temptation and slipped at last is yet stronger and more faithful than you, who have never

been tempted at all. And if he has the pluck to get up and go on again, and try to recover what he's lost—he's a hero. I don't care what you or anyone says to the contrary. I'd sooner trust my whole life to such a man, than one year of it to a spiteful, self-satisfied saint. I'd sooner have a real, big sin any day and a bit of genuine grit and purpose, than the sort of little piffing sins and errors that are all your class are probably capable of," and her face worked with feeling.

"Oh, yes," he said, "she's shown grit and obstinacy, I'll admit that. I might have been warned when she insisted upon having you and that other cur for god-parents; and when she would give all his things away. Any natural mother would have saved them and loved them; but no—not a toy, not a garment, put away in a drawer with natural tears—everything given away, and never a word—never a word to the child's father. And then she wanted to bury him on the farm. Wanted to have his grave near her, so that he wouldn't be afraid. Of all the heathenish notions I ever heard of! The idea of burying a child out in the wilderness, when there was consecrated ground only twelve miles away. For the matter of that I would have taken him fifty miles rather than rob him of his right to lie in God's acre."

"And I would have scratched a grave with my own hands where she wanted it, rather than deny her. Poor, poor little Joyce! That must have been the last straw," and tears gathered in Dinah's eyes.

"Oh, of course you side with her. It is evident enough you are all heathens together. Perhaps it's a good thing the poor little child died. With a mother holding such notions as hers seem to have been, he might have grown up anything. Well, there's only wrecks for all of us now. I'm glad, anyhow, my path lies away from my fellows, for I couldn't face many of them any more. Joyce can keep most of the jeers and gibes for herself, living openly in sin. She's killed both my love and my pity. She made her bed for herself—now she can lie on it."

"No, that she did *not*," and Dinah faced him very squarely. "It is *you* who have made it. When her mother entrusted her to your keeping she believed you would give her the love and sympathy and tenderness that were her due. And I say you have given her none. She came to you for bread, and you gave her a stone.

Your groanings and moanings wore her out ; your morbidness crushed her. Your utter and absolute lack of sympathy with a young, bright nature froze her heart. You wanted a housekeeper, and she pleased your fancy. I say it is an insult to talk of love. There was no love. You don't know anything about love. You had only a hateful, commonplace need, and as long as she filled it you paid her with clothes and food and lodging, and prided yourself you were being exceedingly good to her. You offered her a place any soulless woman could have filled, and she accepted it in blindness and ignorance, only to learn too late that she had sealed her own fate. If you have lived with her a hundred years you would never have discovered that a beautiful, richly-endowed soul breathed in her every word and action. And it was her right to be discovered and loved. Oh ! I don't know anything about your cut-and-dried laws and rites and maxims. I know that Joyce had a right to expect from you the love and tenderness and understanding that she will surely have from Cecil Lawson—and for need of which she would have broken her heart and died in that sepulchre of kopjes with you."

"Much good it will do her," the sneer again deepening. "Will his love and understanding make her an honest woman? If she has a child, will they give it the right to a name? No, I tell you. While I hang my head, she shall hang hers. For every gibe at me, as the forsaken husband, there shall be two for her as the forsaking, nameless wife. Some men would perhaps kill her lover, but I know Joyce well enough to know better how to punish her. The ignominy will crush her—and him through her as well."

Then again, overcome by the cruelty of it, Dinah pleaded. "For God's sake, show a little mercy!" she urged. "She is but a child, and she served you faithfully until her baby's death crushed her. Her delicate health now is the result largely of this climate, and having to live away from civilization; and she had to face it in the first place under the cloud of grief at her mother's death. I don't ask you to forgive her, but I do implore you to set her free."

"No, I will not," doggedly. "It is against my principles altogether that divorced persons should be allowed to marry; and what little I can do to prevent it I will. They

deserve the worst that can befall them, and from the bottom of my heart I wish them the worst."

"Heart!" scornfully; "I rather think that was a portion of your anatomy that was forgotten. You haven't got as much heart as my cat!"

"As for him," ignoring her, "I shall leave no stone unturned to ruin him. I may be only a farmer out here, but I have some influence in England. My family——" sententiously.

"Oh, hang your family! Descended from kings, I suppose! and every one knows kings used to be as plentiful in Ireland as if they had been sprinkled from a pepper-pot. Irish royal ancestors make me tired. And as for Cecil Lawson's career—well, I'm a De Eresby, and perhaps we can circumvent all your feline spite whatever you do."

"Are you?" relapsing to a tone of insult; "well, I hardly think your people will love you any the better for dragging their name into this sort of thing. It's a disgrace to you, and a disgrace to them through you; and judging by the spirit in which you treat the incident, I should think your own morals leave a great deal to be desired."

"Oh, you do, do you?"

The voice of Billy was icily calm as he stood in the doorway, and there was a subdued fire in his eyes before which the sncerer, brave enough with only a woman to bully, quailed instantly.

There was a second's tense silence, then Billy advanced into the room.

"Now," he said, "if I didn't think you were probably feeling too mad to know quite what you were saying, I'd force you down on your knees to apologize to my sister for that remark. As it is, get out sharp, before I kick you out!" and he never took his eyes off him, while he slunk away and mounted his horse.

"The low, insolent cur! Why didn't Burnett stay in with you? I wonder you didn't fire him out long ago."

But Dinah had collapsed ignominiously into an arm-chair, and had scarcely fortitude enough to keep herself calm, much less do any firing out.

"What's it all about, Di? He can't be such an ass as to blame you. Good Lord! you're not going to cry, are you?"

She rallied herself as well as she could.

"Billy he's—he's—a *devil*. He swears he won't free her. He swears he'll ruin both of them, and kill her in the process."

Billy gave a long, low, significant whistle.

"And if we're not very careful he will. She's so sensitive. It's just the thing of all others to crush her. And he knows it. Oh, how I *hate* him. I was a little bit sorry at first, because he spoke of the child, and it did seem as if he had lost everything at once; but afterwards—— Oh! I can't tell you what he is, with his maxims, and moralizing, while all the time, his soul is filled with only one thought—and that is black and cruel revenge."

"What in the world did you listen for? Why didn't you tell him to get out?"

"I had to try to do something when I knew what course he meant to take. It's awful to think of. I must write to the doctor at once, and tell him on no account to let her see any letters. His will be worse than brutal. What a wicked shame we can't force him to release her. I never in my life knew anything so antiquated and imbecile as some of our English laws. I'll just write my letter, and then take me back to The Knoll quickly, there's a dear boy; for I long to get out of this atmosphere, polluted by that creature's fiendish spite; and back again to Jim and Beauty and Ted, and all their dear freshness and manliness."

Nevertheless, as they drove across the fresh-blowing veldt, Dinah's heart was heavy and anxious. She saw plainly enough now which way the tragic element might lie.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE WINGED FATE

If Joyce had been tall and strong, it is more than likely that Miss Maitland, in spite of her affection for Dinah, would have demurred greatly about receiving her under the circumstances. As it was, seeing she was small, and frail, and sad, like the Little Brown Mouse, she opened her arms wide to her, and took her to her heart at once.

The doctor had been unspeakably glad to receive Dinah's suggestion, and, later on, to act upon it, for the voyage did not do very much towards restoring Joyce, and she needed just such care and tenderness as Miss Maitland's beyond anything. The very fact that she had come from Rhodesia and knew Beauty was an instant bond between the fragile stranger and the strong-featured woman, whose only romance was in her memories of her dead sister, and that sister's devoted husband. Dinah was an almost stronger bond, and before Joyce had been in her care a week, she was established in the aching void left by the little consumptive, and Miss Maitland rose above her principles and disapproval, and had only room for loving. Certainly it was not achieved without anxious qualms. For a few days she had a kind of feeling that the roof might fall upon her, or some spirit rise up from the floor and denounce her, but as nothing out of the ordinary occurred, and Joyce appeared quite the most lovable of invalids, her qualms subsided gradually, and she seemed to forget that wronged husband across the sea. Of course, it was all very remarkable and incomprehensible that she should be able to forget, but her sound common sense aided her not a little in showing her these were neither weak nor selfish delinquents, and she knew instinctively that the crucial step had only been taken after much storm and stress, and was in some mysterious way the outcome of strength rather than weakness.

For the rest it was transparently evident that Joyce needed the tenderest care and solicitude to keep her with them at all, and her motherly heart bled for her when she thought of the lonely isolated farm, where delicacies were unprocurable, and there had been no woman to take care of her. When finally Joyce told her about her little child, buried in that far-away land, she wiped away tears of deepest sympathy, and became her staunch protectress from that hour.

And all the time, speeding across the smiling waters, came a silent, winged Fate.

The doctor had been very busy during the week since he and Joyce had reached Southampton, and he had taken her straight to Miss Maitland. Arrears of work awaited him, and patients who insisted upon being visited by no other, after hearing of his return. Each day he

went about the usual routine—quiet, resolute, strong as ever; yet never quite without the thought of the shadow at his heels.

How long, he asked himself at times, will these people want me? How ready will many of them be to cast me off? How soon will the story become known, and cold, unfriendly glances, where I have known only smiles, tell me my fate is already in the balance?

But behind everything, through, above, and over it, close, from hour to hour against his heart, was the precious thought that he had rescued her. The thought that in a little while this old familiar routine of deeply interesting work might be brought to a sudden close, cast no shadow whatever, no qualm of regret, across the difficult path of his love. For her sake he hoped for the best, but whatever it was, regret would never to his dying day find a foothold in his strong heart. The spirit of great deeds held him faithfully still. The spirit that, having chosen, never looks back nor falters, but faces the foe with unswerving resolution to the last gasp.

Each day took him over to Hampstead, to the patient who had never ceased to need his care, and whose tired heart he sought now to inspire with some of his own hopefulness and vigour.

For Joyce was mentally and physically exhausted still, and though the greatest joy left her was to be with him, he knew that her arms still ached pitifully for the tiny burden in that far-away cemetery.

Always, nestling in his arms, she would smile softly, and tell him she was feeling much better, and was happy to be with him—but behind the smile there was still an anguish that he could not hope to soothe until Time had laid her healing touch.

Then came Saturday—mail day—and with it an unlooked-for rush of work. He had promised Joyce and Miss Maitland to be up at six, but at four he knew it was impossible to reach them before eight, and perhaps not then, and hurried home to send a boy with the message.

On the hall-table lay some letters—one on the top, in Dinah's handwriting to Mrs. Grant—one beneath in an unfamiliar hand, also to Mrs. Grant.

The doctor hesitated a moment, hardly knowing what to do. He had been so rushed all day, he had not had time to consider the advisability of opening any letter

of Joyce's, and the idea coming suddenly was hateful in the extreme. He glanced through the rest, still hesitating, while the boy stood waiting. Ah! there was one for him from Dinah also, a lengthy one, judging by the thickness. Well, it must wait. He could not stop now. He turned sharply away, with Joyce's two letters still in his hand, to encounter the waiting boy.

"What are you waiting for? You have the message——"

The boy glanced at the letters, a little abashed.

"Oh! these for Mrs. Grant! Yes, you may as well take them. Say I will come up at eight if I possibly can—and, if not, I will come early in the morning."

Then the boy hurried away, and the doctor went out again to his brougham.

Joyce and Miss Maitland had just finished tea when the letters were brought in, and Miss Maitland went out herself to interview the messenger, afterwards attending to one or two small household affairs.

Alone in the sitting-room Joyce looked at the envelopes, and turned a shade paler. She read Dinah's first, to fortify herself, and then slowly opened the other.

"DEAR JOYCE" (it ran),

"It is not worth while for me to criticize your action now. It is done, and cannot be undone, and only the consequences remain. These, I imagine, will not be quite what your letter seems to suggest you expect.

"You have chosen to dishonour my name, and wreck my home, and disgrace your poor little dead child, and now you may drink the cup of your own sinfulness.

"Under no circumstances will I set you free. What you are, you can remain, and you hardly need me to tell you what that is, and whither it is likely to lead you. When your lover is tired of you he will cast you adrift, to find someone else, and it will serve you right.

"When your prettiness is gone you will doubtless come to the streets, and all I have to say is, that when that time comes, I hope the thought of the poor little innocent child you have disgraced will burn your heart like live coals.

"I have already burnt everything here belonging to you, as I want no harlot's belongings in my house, and

I shall now try and ruin the blackguard, whose fickle, sinful caresses you prefer to my honest love and protection.

"It is useless to renew your request. Once for all, *I will not free you*. You seem to like sin, so you may live in it, and I hope the jeers and scorn of your fellows may at last awaken in your evil conscience a bitter repentance.

"OSWALD GRANT."

For one moment the whole room swam round her. She clutched at a chair for support, and opened her lips to speak, but no sound came, and everything grew blurred and indistinct.

Then she fell heavily in a dead faint.

The doctor was just leaving the house where he had been detained after an operation, when his page-boy came running down the street. He carried in his hand an opened telegram, sent to the housekeeper, and held it out urgently as he approached.

When the doctor read it, his face blanched to a deadly pallor. "Miss Maitland, Hampstead," he said to the coachman, as if a tightness at his throat made it difficult to speak, "and drive as fast as you can."

CHAPTER XXXIX

A JOURNEY WEST

FOR weeks Joyce lay like a delicate white flower broken by a storm. How they kept her alive was a mystery, for the prostration was so great; it seemed as if any moment she might slip from their grasp.

But perhaps, in that dread time, of all revivifying influences, Miss Maitland's was the strongest. She was necessarily so unbiassed in her judgment, that Joyce could not but feel a certain strength in her support, which she might have been afraid to allow herself to feel in her lover's.

As for Miss Maitland herself, her love only deepened and strengthened daily, for the little sufferer so unexpectedly dependent on her tenderness, and that old aching void passed, to a great extent, away.

It is a comforting reflection that when Life takes away

with one hand, she very often gives with the other. Since the Little Brown Mouse died, Helen Maitland's life had been empty indeed. She tried to interest herself in charitable work, and in church work, being before all things a good Churchwoman, but neither made any real difference to the aching void, merely filling in unoccupied hours. A big, warm heart full of love still longed restlessly for something tangible and real upon which to expend itself. Then almost out of the very clouds themselves came Joyce. Before she came, Miss Maitland would have said the position was impossible. It would not be harsh judgment, nor selfish narrowness, it would be the natural outcome of a strictly orthodox bringing up, followed by a strictly orthodox life. She would not have actually condemned perhaps, but she would firmly and unswervingly have declined to be mixed up in anything of the kind, because it would have been against the whole teaching of her existence.

But when, after learning to love Joyce for herself, she saw her husband's brutal letter, her indignation knew no bounds. It swept aside every consideration in heaven or earth but passionate protest and enfolding love.

When, that first terrible evening, after hours of tender watching, she and the doctor left Joyce in a fitful sleep for a few minutes, and she went into another room with him to receive instructions until he could come back, her attitude seemed to have still further changed.

In the first quiet moments Cecil had handed her the letter and asked her to read it, and when she had replaced it in the envelope her mind was made up. Hitherto she had been deprecatingly loving. Now every mother instinct was aroused, and she was only ready, at any cost, to protect, and she lost no time in giving him the comfort of knowing it.

And in that quiet room, whither they adjourned, she saw something which no one else ever saw, and which only deepened her protecting instinct.

She saw Cecil Lawson break down. For a dreadful five minutes he sat with his arms on the table and his face buried on them on the very edge of despair.

"Fool—fool—fool!" he muttered; "how could I risk letting her see it! I ought to have known. I ought to have anticipated it. Poor little child! have I given you your death-blow? . . ."

Miss Maitland realized that at any cost he must not be unnerved, so she put her hand on his shoulder kindly, and said: "No one could know. No one could have anticipated anything so inhuman. Who is he, that he dares to institute himself Judge, and pass sentence? Is he sinless himself, that he dare harp so on another's sinfulness? I had a lingering pity for him before, to lose so sweet a wife, but now I have only anger and contempt. Come, doctor, you must not give way. We shall need all our strength to pull her through."

He raised a drawn face and grasped her hand.

"What should I have done without you?" he said.

And through the dark weeks that followed his words were more than vindicated. For where his love and tenderness might have failed, the love of a good woman like Miss Maitland stepped in with soothing and healing. Not all her lover's strength could have raised so satisfactory a shield at that time between Joyce and the world, as did Miss Maitland, and Dinah, and dear, sturdy, loyal Jim.

Meanwhile the doctor set himself to make plans. He had not the smallest intention of giving Joyce up, whatever the consequences, so without any further delay he set about selling his excellent practice. As he anticipated, the story was in all the papers the week after Oswald's letter, and a low murmur of disapproval was quickly audible. He was so unreservedly trusted and liked, however, that there is little doubt he could have lived it down in the end, had he given his whole attention to doing so; but his whole attention, instead, was riveted on Joyce's recovery and on plans which could make their future life together happy in spite of those who sought to ruin it. A colony was out of the question because of her delicacy, and for the same reason they could not stay in London.

He ventured to broach Joyce on the subject when she was stronger, but the idea of his giving up his profession hurt her grievously, and she only urged him to do nothing definite that could be avoided.

"I shan't be a burden for very long," she told him gently, "and then you must get back into the old groove. I am not worth giving up everything for. If I could just see Devon's blue sea, and the gulls, and the cliffs, it would be better for me to die and go to my little one."

For answer he only talked to her about his need of her, and quickly formed a definite plan in his own mind.

When he said good-bye, he told her not to expect him again for a day or two, as he had to go out of town, and the next morning saw him on his way to the fishing village in Devon, where Joyce had been so radiantly happy with her mother before Oswald Grant came into her life. He roamed all round it, noting all the familiar spots she had told him of, and finally reaching the pretty cottage in which they had lived. Someone else was living there now, and he turned away sadly and sat a moment on a stile near by, looking over the sea, and picturing her as she must have been in those days of laughter and sunshine.

He was aroused by a pleasant good-day from an elderly sportsman, strolling along with a gun and two dogs, and Cecil was rather glad to fall into conversation with him. Finally, he asked him if he could tell him of a house in the neighbourhood with a good sea view to be had for a small rent.

"Do you want this neighbourhood particularly?" asked the stranger.

"I rather want the Devon coast," Cecil told him. "I'm very much taken with that cottage," nodding towards Joyce's old home. "I suppose there is no chance of getting it?"

"Well, no. An old housekeeper of mine has it now, and I thought of keeping it for her as long as she lives. A mother and daughter had it before—very special friends of mine—and I've had a fondness for it ever since."

Cecil looked keenly into the bronzed, pleasant face; an action not lost upon the owner of it, who had already jumped to the conclusion that it was a little odd this Londoner should be roaming that small fishing village, and have set his fancy upon that particular house.

"The mother died," he volunteered, "and the little lass married and went to foreign parts. I gave her a pony to take with her, because I knew she'd be homesick for Devon, and he'd be a bit of company for her."

At the mention of the pony Cecil gave a little involuntary start, likewise not lost on the speaker.

"She went to Rhodesia," said Joyce's old friend, the squire. "Do you know it at all?"

"Yes," Cecil answered, not quite sure what line to take.

"Maybe you've met her? One always feels in those sparsely populated countries everyone knows everyone. Grant was the name of the man she married, and he had a farm called Killarney. Did you come across anyone of the name?"

By this time Cecil had become aware that he was not being asked entirely idle questions. For, although the squire had the typical country gait and drawl, he had a pair of keen blue eyes that belied his air of slowness, and it was easy to see his brain was distinctly on the alert. Cecil reasoned swiftly that if he attempted to hide his acquaintanceship now, it would only look foolish later on, supposing they settled there, so he replied as naturally as he could:

"Mrs. Grant, of Killarney, near Salisbury? Yes, I know her well."

"Ah!" The squire donned a thoughtful air and looked out to sea. Then suddenly he turned to Cecil again. "Did you know the man she went away with?"

Cecil smothered a surprised exclamation, and replied: "I did."

"Ah!" and the squire again looked out to sea.

"The prettiest, happiest, bonniest, lass I ever saw," he said presently, half to himself. "If that long-faced, sulky-looking lamp-post who took her away wasn't good to her, I'd like to have the job of breaking every bone in his body."

"How did you know she had left him?" asked Cecil at last.

"How did I know?" glancing at him. "Why, we all know. Everyone here has been talking of it. Information was sent from someone—out of spite, I daresay—to the editor of the local paper; and, of course, being Joyce Gray, whose father was parson here for years, the tale soon went round."

Cecil knit his forehead into something of a frown. It was evident enough to him whose handiwork it was. Had not that same spite been dogging his footsteps at every turn, ever since they reached England, and meeting him face to face at most unexpected corners?

The squire was watching him covertly. "Have you heard anything of her since?" he asked.

"Yes," looking away to the sea. "She has been very ill."

"Ah! . . ." said the squire again, and glanced significantly towards the pretty cottage. "A pity she can't come down here. She used to love every stick and stone of it, but it wouldn't do"—shaking his head—"it wouldn't do . . ."

"You think not? . . . I . . . believe she is thinking of coming."

"She'd better not," in a kindly, grave voice. "It would hurt her. She is such a sensitive lassie. Our present parson, he's all right in his way, but he's a bit over narrow; and he's never quite forgiven Joyce and her mother for being so beloved, and his predecessor for lingering so long in the hearts of his parishioners. There was a bit of unconscious rivalry, and it rankled. And he knows the story. Had a hand in letting it out. His wife is a great talker. He told her, and she did the rest. Women generally do. I've been sore about it myself, for I was fonder of Joyce Gray than any other friend she had; and I've always looked forward to seeing her come back with a bairn or two, and perhaps stay up at the Hall. But this seems to have knocked everything on the head. It's a bad business. I can't reconcile it to Joyce Gray, anyhow. Did she have a child out there?"

"Yes, a little son. One of the loveliest children that ever breathed, I've been told."

"And did she leave him behind?"

"Yes—in the cemetery."

"Ah! . . ."

There was an impressive silence, of thoughts too deep for words.

"I'm not one to judge," he said presently, "and I know what Joyce was. There's only one solution to me, and that lays all the blame on the man who was her husband. I remember the shock I had when her mother told me the marriage was arranged; for I had had a chat with him the previous day and had been unfavourably impressed. Still, one hoped for the best, and Joyce was always happy if there was a child about."

A short pause. "Left him in the cemetery, did she? Broke her heart, I expect, and only that wet blanket to help her through. Ah, well—what's the other chap like?"

"He'll be good to her," slowly, but avoiding the keen blue eyes.

"You know him too, perhaps?"

"Yes."

"A doctor, they say. A specialist, with a fashionable practice in Brook Street?"

"Yes."

"Well, he must have been pretty deep in love to risk all that?"

"He was."

There was another short silence.

"Will he have to sell up, do you think? They say her husband has refused to free her."

"He probably will sell up."

"And go abroad, like the rest of them?"

"He couldn't take her abroad—she's too delicate."

"Ah! . . . She didn't ail much here. But her mother was a poor creature."

Suddenly Cecil decided to take the bull by the horns.

"It's on her account I came down to look for a cottage. She had a fancy for her old home."

"I thought so," quietly; "but you've been a long time getting it out. Maybe you're the doctor with the fashionable practice, who is ready to give it up for her?"

"I am."

"So—so." There was a slight pause, then he finished: "Well, if you're going to see Joyce Gray through thick and thin, and stand by her when all the world's against her, there's my hand, and I'm glad to meet you."

Cecil took the outstretched hand and exclaimed, a little stammeringly: "You're—you're very good."

"Don't say any more. I like the look of you, and I couldn't stand the other chap. It's a pity it had to be done in this particular fashion. Always a bad job to ruffle folks' feelings if it can be helped. I often think the world's a silly old fool, but it's a damned old stickler as well; and it's got a nasty way of getting the best of anyone who flouts it. Still, it's always worth while to have a good try to come out top, and I'm very glad I ran into you to-day, because I think I can give you a hand. You want a quiet home, for a time, and Joyce has a longing for her old haunts. Well, I can tell you the very house, and it's not too near here, which is just as well. There's a roomy, solid, comfortable old farm-

house on Pentill Headland, which is wanting a tenant. A farmer I know has taken over the farm lately, but he doesn't want the house, as he's living on another farm. Come and stay the night at the Hall and tell me all about the little lass, and take the train into Cornwall to-morrow morning."

Cecil most gratefully accepted his offer, and the next morning journeyed to Pentill Headland where he found the roomy farmhouse greatly to his liking, and set about acquiring the refusal of it at once.

He stood looking out from the windows across the bay with its magnificent headlands to Trehearne Lighthouse, and he knew it was a prospect that would delight Joyce. Here, at least, until she was strong again, he could keep her safe from the world's harsh judgment, for her beloved sea would guard her on three sides, and neither taunt nor gibe could easily find her. His eyes rested tenderly on the silver shining mouth of the Wavel River, where it glides quietly into the sea right before their windows. Swinburne's lines passed through his mind :

" Even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea."

and he smiled softly to himself, thinking how on that sun-bathed, sea-girt headland Joyce should grow strong and happy again in the security of his love.

And he would write.

In his busy, brilliant brain there were ever floating fugitive ideas on this phase and that of medical science and human disease. Ideas he had never really had time to capture and imprison in black-and-white type. Now he would call them all to his aid. Oswald Grant might wreak his worst spite upon the reputation of Cecil Lawson, and thwart his work of healing—but there should be another whom he could not touch, and who might yet heal unknown, at the same time building up in obscurity a new fame to lay at Joyce's feet.

He smiled back at the setting sun from the window which was to be hers, looking across the bay and the headlands to the golden West.

" She will be happy here," he said. " Oh ! Thou Power behind the sunset, grant that she may find happiness here."

CHAPTER XL

"WHITHER THOU GOEST——"

WHEN Cecil reached Joyce the following evening, he found it more difficult than he had expected to tell her he had seen a house in Cornwall instead of Devon. Looking up from among her cushions on the sofa where she was now able to pass a few hours each day, her beautiful eyes were full of an unspoken question concerning his real reason.

Holding her hand in his firm clasp, he told her how he had seen her old friend, Squire Bradley, and how he had asked after her very affectionately, and on discovering who he was, made him go up to the Hall for the night.

"And did he say there was no house near there?"

"Yes, dear. He told me you would love this place on Pentill Headland, and so I'm sure you would. The view is magnificent, and no one would worry us except just the people we want. And you would soon grow strong again, *ma chérie*—and then it will all be easier."

But still she watched him with that unspoken question in her eyes.

He leaned over her: "Are you pleased, little one? Will you come there with me and try to grow strong and happy again?"

Sudden tears gathered in her eyes.

"I—I—can't bear you to give up everything——"

He passed his arm round her and drew her close to him.

"My dear little girl," in a low, firm voice, "you must try not to look at it in that way any more. Do you think I would have been likely to come for you without having first thought out all the consequences? Do you think, loving you as I do, anything could now make me regret, except your unhappiness? That, Joyce, I think, would almost break me."

"I want to be happy," she told him. "But I am

afraid. I had not thought that it would be like this. Now—I feel—as if he could perhaps say those dreadful things—to my little child—and—and perhaps——” her voice broke.

He soothed her tenderly, entreating her to put such thoughts away for his sake; but the unasked question still haunted her eyes.

“Did Squire Bradley know?” she asked at last.

“Yes, dear; but he only spoke of how fond he was of you, and how he was sure it had not been your fault. He hoped we should be happy at Pentill.”

“But if he knew, they must have known in the village; and perhaps they will all hate me and think the cruel things that he does.” She clung to him in a sudden rush of weakness.

“I *can't* bear it, Cecil. It would be better to let me die. Do you remember how I dreamed of taking Baby there with Dinah, and how he was to pick buttercups and daisies where I did? And now he is gone, and the old friends would not even want me. They would turn away from me as something bad and impure, and never understand how it had all been a little too much. I know that is what the dear old squire told you, and why you went away into Cornwall. And, by and by, Cecil, you may think the same. How shall I bear it? I have no courage left like I used to have. It is better I should die, and you should be free again.”

And still he spoke to her in that low, firm voice: “You are hurting me, Joyce, to talk like that. For my sake you must be brave and strong again. You must try to realize that my whole life would be a blank without you now. I do not ask anything more than to see you well and happy again, and to get on with all this writing I have in my mind. And you, dear, you would like to be with me better than anything?” he finished, a little wistfully.

“Oh, yes, yes—only—— Oh, Cecil! can't you understand how it's breaking me to have to come to you like this? How shall I know that what the others say of me is not creeping into your mind? How shall I know it is not pity only that keeps you by me? You know what is always said—how a man's wife must be pure—must be beyond all taint even of suspicion—and how shall I——” She broke down into low weeping;

then with a clinging movement of intolerable pain, she sobbed: "Oh, Cecil! how shall I bear the thought that perhaps I am not pure to you?"

"My little one," he said painfully, "my dear little one, you must never let such a thought enter your head. Listen! I will swear it to you, if you like—in my eyes you are as pure as the purest of God's angels; you could not be otherwise. It is I, with my man's sinning, who should be abashed. Knowing myself as I do, and knowing you, I could only kneel down to your purity."

He gathered her up in his arms and kissed her eyes and lips and forehead.

"Do you remember the Benediction?" he whispered. "It is the only prayer that I know how to pray: 'O God, if there is a God, bless my little white-souled wife!'"

She nestled closer, gradually becoming more soothed.

"Talk to me," she whispered. "I'm not a coward really, but I love you so, and it kills me to think of being anything but good in your eyes. Tell me what Goodness means to you? How is it that I can live with you, as we must, if I don't leave you, and still be pure in your eyes?"

He caressed her hair tenderly for many moments before he spoke, feeling deeply how much hung on his words. He knew that if she brooded on her own sense of sinfulness, as presented so cruelly by her husband's letter, he would lose her yet, and all his love would not avail to save her. He knew, though she had said nothing, that already the instinctive knowledge of why he had avoided her old home, was making fresh havoc in the exhausted brain.

Then he began to talk soothingly, quietly, showing her how she could do this thing, and be none the less perfect to him.

It was not perhaps orthodox, for the doctor was not orthodox, but he was strong, and true, and unselfish—which many orthodox people are not. And because his life had been nearly always given for others, and no sad, unhappy, pitiful case had ever appealed to him in vain, he had perhaps a right to some theory which was not altogether the theory of that company of good people who pass along the stated lines, and yet do far less for their suffering fellow-creatures than he. It might be

said of him that he had little to say but much to show. No definite faith, but abundance of deeds.

And now, speaking of right and wrong, good and bad, he told Joyce how there had grown up in his consciousness a feeling that there was no fixed dividing line between these two opposing forces, but one long line upon which each individual consciousness sets its own line of division according to its inborn feelings. How, without quite knowing what "right" is, we all seem born with an inkling of it, and a desire to follow it; so perhaps there can be right and no wrong—good, and no bad—all things being but grades in a long sequence, and we moving in but a short span thereof.

"But this is why it is impossible for us to judge each other," he told her; "for no man can know by what light his fellow was guided. And why, so long as we are not ashamed before the judgment bar of our own hearts, we may even try to be strong enough to bear unruffled the condemnation of our fellows."

He talked on a little longer in the way she so loved. Just telling her his big thoughts and hopes quietly, in a manner that sought no comment, only the silent, understanding sympathy of two souls perfectly attuned.

Joyce was not specially clever nor learned, but she possessed in a high degree that rare gift of sympathy, which is so much better than braininess, and at such times, when he had succeeded in soothing away the ever-recurrent fears and nerve-racking memories, theirs was that high communion of spirit which is perhaps the best thing mortal man can know.

When it was time for him to leave her, he carried her himself into her room, and, putting her down in a large chair, knelt a few moments beside her.

"Joyce, dearest," he said, "are you going to be brave and strong? and come away with me for the long honeymoon that only ceases with death? May I wire to-morrow morning that we will take this house, and go as soon as ever it is ready for us? See, little woman—I am kneeling to you—I always shall—you need have no further qualms. I am not the man to turn back, having once taken a crucial step. Neither am I the man to take a crucial step without having first thought it out thoroughly in every light. Kiss me, little girl, and say, 'I will come, and I will try to forget the past.'"

She raised her lips to him at once, and then whispered softly, "*Whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge.*"

He stood up, and there was a mist before his eyes. Then he stooped, as ever before parting, and kissed her forehead. "Your benediction, little one," he said tenderly, and left her.

Yet as he made his way home his thoughts were chiefly anxious. The mischief was terribly deep-rooted—he could in no wise blind himself to that—with all his man's strength and all his man's love, would he ever prevail against it?

The twofold shock of the child's death and the bitter letter had struck at the root of her vitality, and she might yet not be able to find the strength to pull through.

Then his heart grew hot within him. If she died, she would be slain by spite—a strong man venting his spite on a weak, bereaved woman—and the spite of those who are ever in such haste to throw stones.

CHAPTER XLI

A LETTER AND A LIGHTHOUSE

THE following day Cecil received a letter from Dinah:

"MY DEAR DOCTOR" (she wrote),

"The moment I come home I am going to turn from a passive suffragette to an active one, for the express purpose of protesting against the Divorce Laws. I shall head a huge procession, probably on stilts, to the Houses of Parliament, and there, waving my stilts wildly in the air, I shall demand redress. My point will be that any man who refuses to free his wife, when she asks him, shall explain his reasons to not less than five hundred suffragettes, and after that, if anything is left of him, it ought to be put in the British Museum, among the Nation's Antiquities, as representing the last of his order.

"You say in your letter you feel that you are fighting the world single-handed for Joyce. Not *single-handed*, beloved physician, for Ted and I are fighting with you, tooth and nail. The world is only heaving mountains,

but we are hurling volcanoes. Just wait till we get home, and then see the sparks fly !

" I am afraid, however, it is quite impossible to poison the mother-in-law, which is more than unfortunate.

" I blame myself exceedingly, not to have cabled you about that letter ; but if you can only keep her heart up for a few more weeks, she will come out top yet.

" The Saint, whom we now, I think, might call the Blue Devil, is, I fancy, too interested in his amiable form of retaliation to feel his actual loss to any extent. I have seen him once or twice in the distance, sowing seed as usual in his most concise and carefully modulated fashion. I have an extraordinary feeling at times that he has been sowing seed from Past Eternities, and will go on sowing it to Future Ages. Is this hallucination ! or do you think he really has ? Perhaps he is a Myth all the time, like Tantalus, and destined to sow and sow for ever, and never reap. I wonder the kopjes don't rise up and fall upon him ; but, doubtless, he would only emerge with a more aggrieved air than ever, and sow over them.

" Oh ! by the way, I'm married—and your poor bosom pal is now a henpecked husband.

" Bally rotten show, matrimony—and so I always said.

" We fell out first over the home-cured bacon, and then over the bath—which, when you come to think of it, was better than falling in. He wanted spice, and I didn't—in the bacon, I mean, not the bath. In the end, we put it in to please him, and took it out to please me, and spoilt the lot. As for the bath, he won't let me have two a day. Another reason to become a suffragette ! What right has a mere man to expect to regulate his wife's washing propensities ?

" Speaking of Suffragettes, what larkly times for everyone here, when those strenuous ladies mount empty whisky casks, on a kopje side, and harangue a crowd of indelicately-clad Mashona women ! Just think of the possibilities for the disturbers ! Rats and mice, forsooth ! Why, any disrespectful male creature can produce a snake at the psychological moment if he wants to—or a wild cat—or a fearsome baboon—or, the creature in his daring, may even lure a lion into the fold ! Yes, I'll certainly do my suffragetting in England.

" We shall get home for Christmas, to receive the parental blessing. I wrote and told my mother-in-law we hated

each other so much we had to marry for safety—one hate being less dangerous than two. I see her already weeping on her firstborn's waistcoat, while I flirt discreetly with my father-in-law in the background.

"Don't you believe it, doctor! The mother-in-law, that I got thrown in with my little lot, is something better than the best—and there's two pretty sisters with complexions that make me shed fiery tears of envy—and a married brother-in-law dutifully helping along the population—and a duck of a papa-in-law, quite a lucky bag full, *n'est-ce pas* ?

"Ted was so solemn at the wedding that he nearly made me cry.

"He thought it was that my feelings were too much for me; but, as I told him afterwards, it was only vexation to find I had tied myself up to a boiled owl. Billy murmured audibly, 'Give her a gin-and-bitters!' which dreadfully shocked the pale young curate who married us.

"We didn't have a honeymoon. Ted had his best hen sitting, and the pig was waiting to be baconed, and a mare had just foaled; so what with one thing and another, there really wasn't time.

"You ought to have seen The Irresponsibles' wedding garments! I never saw them all three look so entirely clothed before. Billy even borrowed a top-hat with a broad band of *crêpe* on it, but we wouldn't let him wear it, and when I last saw it a cat had deposited her kittens therein. Nice for the owner, but Billy is far more likely to swap it with a nigger for monkey-nuts, or something, than return it. He's awfully pleased with himself about giving me away; but he says when he was half through, the pale young curate became so embarrassed he begged him not to proceed. We had lunch at The Residency, and left The Three Irresponsibles getting more imbecile every moment, while we drove home in haste to see if the precious hen was sitting tight. We may have a proper wedding in England, as this was such a hurried affair, we being so busy with the live-stock, that we're not quite sure if it was all correct. We can't remember anything much, except hurrying home about the precious hen; but I don't think Ted *could* have looked quite such a boiled owl, if he hadn't felt he was entangling himself past all redemption.

"Oh! and the pale young curate gave me a receipt, and I asked him if I was to put it on the file with the other

receipts, and he looked shocked—but how was I to know? As a matter of fact, I've lost it already; only I daren't say anything for fear it upsets the sitting hen.

"I'm going to write to Joyce now—after I've turned the eggs in the incubator. Tiresome thing about being too assiduous in good intentions!—One day Ted turned them all in the morning, and I turned them all in the afternoon, and we grew grey considering whether it was better to turn them back, or leave them as they were, or how to even up things? You see, they've had half a turn too much, and now we're dreadfully afraid the chickens will all come out with their heads turned round the wrong way! If you can suggest a remedy while there is yet time, cable instructions, as this lot of chickens has to pay for our last sack of flour.

"Good-bye—many salaams,

"DINAH."

The doctor enjoyed his letter over a cup of tea, and, later, carried it up to Hampstead to have a laugh over it with Joyce and Miss Maitland.

He had had a trying day with patients who did not want him to go, and urged him to stay and face the music. This was so emphatically what he would have wished to do, under ordinary circumstances, that it made it a little harder to combat those who sought to influence him. But he knew Joyce must come first now; and life in London with him, while her husband continued obdurate about freeing her, was a sheer impossibility. He felt himself bound to shield her now, to his utmost, at any cost, and so he turned a deaf ear to those who told him he had proved himself too skilful to be lightly dispensed with, and a strong front would carry him through. He knew, from one or two sources, that the work Oswald had commenced was being mercilessly carried forward by his mother, and were Joyce within reach of their shafts, they would never cease to aim them at her. Her chance for a complete recovery was just such rest and seclusion as the Cornish home promised, and he resolutely thrust all other propositions aside, and kept his mind on the works he hoped to write.

What really hurt him most was his poor people. His successor would look after his paying patients well enough, but who was to take his place in those disease-stricken haunts of Soho where he was one of the very few men who

could pass in and out unmolested, at any hour of the day or night. He could not even bring himself to tell his stricken friends there that he was going away for good. He only implied that he was again going away for his health, and before very long would look in upon them once more. And this he truly meant to do, even going so far as to ask the district nurse to appeal to him in Cornwall, if there were any particularly difficult cases needing expert treatment.

So finally it came about that one evening, a few months after the mail train bore him and Joyce away from Rhodesia, a Great Western train whirled them to the West Country, and an exhausted little invalid was carried over the threshold of the new home. As they arrived, the sun was sinking in untold splendour over the sea, clothing all the earth and sky in rose and gold. For a few happy moments Cecil let her gaze at it all from the window, and watched thankfully the gladness that stole over her tired, white face. The winding river sank peacefully into the sea just before them, the tall hills lay wrapt in a soft mystery of twilight beyond—the lighthouse stood out steadfast and strong on its magnificent headland.

On the no less magnificent headland of their home—it was as if the world was all their own.

"Oh, it is beautiful—beautiful," she breathed; "it is—*Home!*"

He kissed the finger-tips of the little hand in his, and together they waited a moment longer to see the first gleam of the lighthouse.

"I don't understand anything so perfect coming to me," she said, "for I have done so little ever to have deserved it. It is like finding a Desired Haven, after tossing all night on a pitiless, stormy sea."

"Perhaps that is just what it is, Little One. The Lighthouse, which is your own brave heart, guided you here. See—there it shines now, flashing you a welcome!"

"How we shall love it!" she told him. "Night after night we shall look for it, and always it will signal us a message of hope out of the dark, obscure Beyond—and that is even better than a welcome. You must be a companion Lighthouse, Cecil, and write wonderful books to enlighten brains all over the world." Then suddenly tears gathered in her eyes, and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"What is it?" he asked tenderly, bending his head close

to hers. "You mustn't fret now you have reached the Desired Haven."

"I won't—oh! I'll try not to—but that little lonely grave is so far away, and sometimes I feel as if I had deserted him. Cecil, if he had lived—oh! if he had lived—I would have borne a whole long life of misery before I would have let him be hurt through me."

"I know you would, darling. And if he had lived, I would have borne a whole long life of emptiness, rather than add one pang of regret to your lot that I could possibly help. But now it is not wise to look back, dear; it is the future that matters, and you must listen to the message of hope out of the obscurity, and conquer out of your strength. You are over-tired to-night. To-morrow you will feel stronger, and it will all be easier."

CHAPTER XLII

THE DOMINION OF DREAMS

It was September, and in the West Countree, that land of cream and honey, a mellow loveliness lay over everything. Joyce and Cecil were never tired of exploring their headland, and every day seemed to bring yet a fresh charm of wonder and delight. A short walk each day was all she could manage at present, but so perfectly was the farmhouse situated, that a short walk in any direction showed them loveliness beyond dreams. Everywhere were gorse-clad slopes of soft, springy turf, varied in places with a covering of rich brown and gold bracken, or clumps of delicious heather, or giant boulders, over which ivy crept in rich profusion, giving them the appearance of the towers and battlements of some mighty, ancient castle. It was one such spot that they grew to love the best. A terrace of the greenest and springiest turf, intersected with ivy-clad boulders, which towered up at the back like massive ramparts. All along the foreground was a bed of richest heather, and beyond—the sea.

And what a sea it is!—this mistress of the Sea-girt Duchy. Of blues and greens indescribable—of gentlest smiles—of dreamiest peace—of most dreaded fury—of romping white horses, whose manes blow back in long

feathery clouds as they come rolling in—of baby wavelets that play round the base of the giant precipices, crooning to themselves in the warmth and sunshine, as they dance and tumble round a scarce seen rock, like children playing at the feet of some gaunt old soldier, who, for all his grizzly appearance, is tenderly keeping watch over them. Of far-away blue distances—of serene, ineffable blue solitudes—of awe-inspiring Infinities that yet rest the spirit with a sense of unutterable calm. Of brown-sailed fishing craft, and busy, self-important little steam-tugs and dainty yachts, and in the far distance the big steamers that link the Human Race all over the world, and keep alive and fresh the great brotherhood of Man. Of gulls like white-winged hopes and dreams, now hovering near, now skimming away, yet always there ; adding a charm to the forbidding, giant cliffs, like the charm of hopes and dreams in a life that might otherwise be bare and desolate indeed. And where the blue touched the coast-line with a fringe of snowy white to the east, more magnificent ramparts and headlands, till, in the distance, the eye rested dreamily on the romantic island rock of King Arthur's ancient castle. And behind the coastline mystic hills of dream, swelling in softly undulating curves into a sky of dream. Everywhere wide horizons, fresh blowing winds—room for a soul to reach out its restless arms towards the ever-fugitive light of the Beyond, without being rudely arrested and crushed back upon itself by the non-understanding crowd.

And everywhere flowers for those who could find them ; at stated times, a veritable paradise of flowers. Of yellow, graceful cowslips and soft-eyed primroses, dreaming beside the ivy-clad boulders—of carpets of bluebells, vying with the blue beyond—of meadows where daisies and buttercups laughed at the foolish grass for trying to show at all—of rough-hewn stone-built walls uplifting masses of sea pinks where they could get a better view of the ships, and show in all their charm of colouring against the blue sky and bluer sea. Of tall, stately foxgloves bowing haughtily to each other as they craned their necks to see all that was going on around, and intensified the general colour harmony by splashes of richest crimson, on a bed of soft green sward, against a background of sun-steeped lichen-covered rocks in ineffable azure—of gay, clustering, climbing honeysuckle, waving joyfully above banks of hart's-tongue ferns—all alike testifying, as best they

could, to the rich result of much rain, and many dreary days of damp mist; calling upon such humans as would hear them, to take heart courageously, if much rain of sorrow and days of grey mist were shadowing their lives; for, rightly absorbed, there should, indeed, result a rich profusion of hours of delight.

Joyce and Cecil drank deep of the cup of happiness vouchsafed them in the present, and tried not to be anxious about the future.

On their terrace of green sward looking over the blue ocean before them, and with the ivy-clad boulders behind and around, Joyce said it was as though they had strayed into some grand old Grecian ruin, on the shores of the Adriatic, and were gazing across to the blue isles of Greece.

Or another day they would stroll to the West, and watch where the winding river emptied itself into the sea, like a tired life passing restfully out into the great heart of the Eternal. Here the massive headlands were nearer; gaunt and grand and magnificent beyond words, against the background of the Golden West. At their foot were dangerous, cruel rocks; but the life-boat waited in continual readiness, and on the farther headland, like a huge white gull in the sunlight, watched the lighthouse. Inside the river mouth was the Desired Haven.

It troubled Joyce not a little to think of the dreaded "doom bar" half-way across the river mouth, and she could only find comfort in the thought that, for some mysterious, unknown purpose, few Desired Havens ever are reached without many dangers and difficulties to be first overcome, and much need for dauntless courage and steadfast enduring. Here, at the sunset hour, a path of gold stretched from their feet into those dream realms of beauty beyond all knowledge—where it is as though a curtain of dazzling light hides some mystical Holy of Holies from mortal eyes.

Or perhaps it would be night, and they would take a little stroll in a world of silver moonlight, while the waves crooned a lullaby at the foot of the sleeping headland. Looking over the murmuring flood at such a time, each clung yearningly to the nearness of human touch and speech, appalled by the unfathomable, unthinkable magnitude of that dim, boundless horizon, and the solemn spectacle of the heavens by night. At such times Joyce turned restfully to the lighthouse.

"It is as the connecting link," she told him once. "The message of light, like a star on the far horizon among the infinite stars, lit by a human hand. Isn't it Lindsay Gordon who says:

'There are lights behind the curtain'?

But this is better, because it is before the curtain. It is to me as a Heaven-sent message of Light—the link of the Human Divine Messenger—signalling far and wide to Life's voyagers, that there is indeed a Desired Haven—behind the veil. Some day when I am gone, and you are here alone, every night that lighthouse will try to tell you that I am very near still. You will not look at my grave, you will look at that signalling light and the stars; and the mystery, and wonder, and beauty of it all will not frighten you—it will help you to feel that I am very near."

"Where do you get all these deep thoughts from?" he asked her tenderly. "You little thing, with your beautiful face, and wonderful, far-seeing eyes?"

She nestled a little closer. "I think Baby told me when I watched by him while he slept, for fear he woke up frightened. It seemed sometimes as if Life might be like a sleep, and Death the moment when we wake up; and then I thought, because we are only like little children to God, He will be sure to be watching so that we do not wake up frightened."

He could only kiss her hair in silence, appalled at the thought of losing her.

But there were still other nights when the rain lashed in a fury against the window, and the wind howled, and swept in long wailing gusts round the house, and the breakers roared at the foot of the cliffs like blood-hounds mad for prey. And then she clung to him in agonizing, nerve-wrung moments—hearing the cries of shipwrecked sailors in the wind, and the terrifying clamouring of little children in the rain on the window, praying to be let in. Such a day and night would leave her white, and ill, and exhausted, and a prey to the old pitiless fears and doubts concerning her equivocal position.

Cecil noted it all with growing anxiety, and often felt that he was still fighting the whole world single-handed to keep her. With her high-strung, delicate sensitiveness,

would she ever survive, in spite of his care, her painful position in the eyes of that world ?

It was after an unusually nerve-racking period, followed by a grey, cheerless day, when she seemed to have scarcely strength enough to walk about the room, that he tucked her up cosily on a sofa, and brought his writing to a little table near her. Joyce watched his busy hand flying over the white sheets for a while, and then fell into a restless sleep. Once she moaned a little, and he watched her with painful anxiety, feeling his heart ready to burst with indignation, that he was debarred even from giving her the protection of his name. Then presently an extraordinary change came over her. The restlessness ceased, the drawn look about the mouth softened indescribably, and a tiny smile hovered round her lips. He went on with his writing feeling renewed, and looking up now and then to make sure the welcome change remained.

And meanwhile, in a strange and wonderful dream, Joyce felt herself pass mysteriously out on the wings of the wind, borne by invisible hands over the blue sea, through the blue solitudes, until she found herself in the Courts of Heaven. And there a large concourse of people seemed to be waiting for her, and as she stood among them she realized slowly that all were looking at her with faces of condemnation. Some were perhaps a little sorry, though sorrowfully disapproving, and some were hard and scornful and sneering. And then she saw that in the midst of the concourse was a Great White Throne, and seated thereon was the Judge of all the Earth. And she knew that she had come to be judged. That she, standing there all alone, was the offender whom all these people had gathered together to condemn. Slowly the invisible hands urged her onward through their pitiless ranks, until alone and unsupported she stood at the foot of the Great Throne. Then a Voice from somewhere near the Throne read aloud the sin of which she was accused, and there was the sound of a sneer among the women accusers that was as the sound of much drawing aside of skirts.

Lastly came a short silence, and then the voice of the Great Judge asked kindly : " Have you anything to plead ? or anything that you would like to say ? "

Then it seemed to Joyce that with sudden and awful vividness, she saw that tiny dead body she had washed

and prepared with her own hands, and kissed all over—the tiny dimpled face that would smile at her no more—the golden curls no longer to be kissed—the tiny hands no longer to be held—the tiny feet no longer to be guided in their first enthralling attempts to walk. She held out her arms, conscious only of their emptiness—the empty, empty arms—and the deathless hunger.

And it was as though a new courage came to her. In the vast silence of the Heavenly Court, she looked up, and her eyes saw only the pitying eyes of the Great Understanding Judge.

“I ask,” she said in a slow, clear tone, “that I may be judged only by those women who have lost a little child who was all they had; or by those women who have sickened in vain and secret yearning for the touch of baby hands, and the sound of baby feet, that were all their own.”

She ceased speaking, lowering her eyes to the ground, though her face was ever bravely towards the Great White Throne.

“It shall be even so,” said the voice of the Judge.

But in the long hush that followed, there was only the sound of departing feet—for those among the throng who might have remained to judge were the first to go away.

And when all had gone, and there was only silence, in tenderest accents, from the Throne came the voice of old:

“Where are these thine accusers?” followed by the time-old sentence of infinite pity and mercy: “Neither do I condemn thee.”

In the room, with its window looking out over the infinite sea, and a shaft of sunlight breaking through the clouds and making a path of light across the waves, Joyce murmured softly and happily in her sleep, and with that tiny, fluttering smile on her lips, awoke.

Cecil got up from his chair and came to her with a feeling of mystery and wonder.

“What is it, little one?” he asked. “Something has pleased you, and healed you in your sleep.”

Nestling in the hollow of his arm, she hid her face against his coat, and said softly:

“I have been in the Presence of God.”

CHAPTER XLIII

BACK TO THE LAND

"My dear Truda, it's no use making a fuss. Our mind—for we are at present in the blissful state of having but one between us—is quite made up. We are going to be very up-to-date, not to say conspicuously fashionable, and we are going *back to the land*. Small Holdings, don't you know—but not Lord Carrington's; he's too overcrowded."

"Ridiculous!" with a little sniff; "you go back to the land, indeed! Why, you're a born Londoner, and you know it. How in the world else could you dress like that? There you are, at this very moment, wearing a gown that only one woman in fifty could look well in. And you look superb! What I want to know is, where, and how, and when do you discover that you are that one woman?"

"I don't discover it, the gown does. It has a sense of fairplay. It knows I paid twenty-five guineas, and it does its best to reward me. Can you imagine anything more delicious than a twenty-five-guinea gown on a Small Holding?"

Dinah stood up very straight on the hearth-rug, and looked down at her aunt with happy, laughing eyes. As Truda had remarked to her husband the previous evening, matrimony had somehow already given Dinah the finishing touch. She was no longer plain. She was scarcely good-looking, but she was astonishingly attractive.

"If, as you say, you've kept the precious farm in Rhodesia in your own hands, what in the world more do you want with farming? With your income and your husband's, a minor post in one of the Government Offices is what he wants—just something to give him occupation."

"Occupation in a Government Office! Really, Truda, you're positively imbecile! Why, he'd be potting at bus drivers and chauffeurs from the office window in no

time. No one in their senses would dream of inflicting themselves with an ex-Rhodesian colonist, unless he had a bit of ground to strut about on with a gun. That's why we're going back to the land. Failing anything else, who's to know he wouldn't keep his hand in on me ! Why, you ought to jump at it, Truda. You know perfectly well you'll be thankful to palm the children off on me half the year, because they've had measles or something—and you'll post the fat and amiable Ralph off at a moment's notice, whenever you've got a carpet up, or the cook with a bilious attack, or because he's getting so fat you're ashamed of him."

"As it happens, he's losing weight. He's two inches less round the waist since he did Sandow exercises regularly."

"Waist !" mockingly ; "it would sound less genteel, perhaps, but be more correct to say middle. But to return to our former subject, Truda, it's a case of back to the land, or back to the colonies—and we've decided to give England a trial first. But you needn't be too sure of us even then, for my new affection for Rhodesia has already survived several months of married life. I tell you, we were like a couple of forlorn ducklings the last night on the farm. We just hated coming away when it came to the point."

"And after the way you wrote home about it, Di !"

"Yes, that's so interesting, isn't it ! I thoroughly enjoy calmly contemplating the complete metamorphosis of my ever-changeable fancies. But why in the world I shouldn't change ?—Or why you should wear such an aggrieved air if I do, is quite incomprehensible ? Still," with a slight shrug, "of course, there were drawbacks—little things like snakes and lions and chita were tiresome—and often there wasn't anything much to eat—and most of the domestic animals have an inconvenient habit of dying."

"It's a good place to go to—and it's a good place to get away from—unless you happen to be built on the lines of The Irresponsibles, who swear hard and fast it is *the* only country to live in."

"Are they all three staying on ?"

"Oh, yes, they'll stay. Beauty is lazier and more romantically charming than ever. Billy grows more blatantly vulgar every day, and the dear U. B. encourages

him in imbecile giggling, except that he's grown quieter since Joyce and her baby vanished from the scene."

"Who is the U. B.? That's a new name, isn't it?"

"Oh, no. We always call Jim the U. B., or the Ugly Bug—when we want to be specially affectionate—but it sounds better in their mud huts than in your drawing-room."

"What's the latest news of Mrs. Grant?"

"Mrs. *Lawson*," corrected Dinah, resolutely, and her face unconsciously assumed what Billy called "Dinah's keep-off-the-grass" expression.

"Mrs. Lawson, then, if you like. Are they getting on all right?"

"It depends upon what you mean by all right. If you mean are they happy—they are apparently in a Seventh Heaven, and likely to remain there, in spite of the continued mud and stone shower which appears to be the only way the aristocratic Grants can think of, to avenge the awful crime of a young woman, once admitted to a faint reflection of their greatness, daring to have a preference for something more in the nature of a man."

"And he still won't free her?"

"No," with a bitterness she could not hide. "I saw him once more before I left, having disciplined myself for Joyce's sake into asking it of him as a favour—and he only resorted to his former cheap sneers, and swore he would not. Ugh! he makes me sick! What Joyce must have endured as his wife! I should have poisoned him in half the time. But there—she's all right now with the dear doctor-man, though I wish he could send better accounts of her health."

"What, is she still ill?"

"Not exactly ill, but so delicate. Of course, she always was more delicate than anyone knew, but I thought she'd soon be strong in the doctor's keeping. It begins to look rather as if the shock of the child's death, and, later, of the letter, had been more serious than we expected. Jim says she was quite demented when he found her. That fool had gone off to bury the dead child twelve miles away in consecrated ground, while he left the living mother to go out of her mind alone. She probably would have done without Jim. He can't speak of it now. His voice breaks and he changes the subject. Billy says he adored the poor

babe—they say he was the loveliest child conceivable—and just as winsome and sweet as he was beautiful.”

“How awful to lose him!” Truda said softly.

“Yes—and out there—all alone, or perhaps worse. But I can’t think of it, even now.”

“Has the doctor private means?”

“Very little. Enough with what he got for his practice to live on down there. Everything is very cheap. But he’ll do well yet with his writing. The doctor’s one of those people who don’t believe in the verb to fail. He’s made of the stuff that gets through by sheer determination. Ted and I are going to see them next week.”

“And where’s the Major, Dinah? I believe you treated him rather badly, after all.”

“The dear Field-Marshal!” Dinah’s face softened visibly, but she only added: “He wrote me a champion letter of congratulation, and gave me two exquisite artist’s proof engravings for a wedding present.”

“You’ll be interested to hear Lady Godiva Stuart is also sending you a wedding present,” with a little laugh.

“She’s not! . . . Good heavens! . . . It will be a kettle-holder, I expect, or one of those appalling door-mats she makes herself. If it comes here you may keep it, Truda. I want none of Lady Gorgonzola’s favours. I’m quite content with her denunciations. I’m no ‘Aunt Eliza’ to be graciously allowed to tie her shoe-lace.”

Truda laughed with a relish at the mere idea, and just then the two men joined them.

Ted Burnett, being still at that stage when a man, entering the drawing-room looks first of all for his wife—not, it must be understood, with any eye to discretion—crossed at once to Dinah, and sat down where he could enjoy an undisturbed view. The fat and amiable Ralph succumbed into a particularly inviting arm-chair, and was at once attacked by his disrespectful niece.

“I congratulate you, Ralph,” she exclaimed; “not on distinction this time, but diminution. I hear it’s two whole inches.”

The youthful uncle laughed good-naturedly and pulled down his waistcoat with an air of pride. “Two inches and one-sixteenth to be correct. In a few weeks I anticipate my family gathering mournfully round me, and shaking their heads over my wasted and feeble frame.”

“That’s when you’ll be dispatched to us. I’ve just

been telling Truda how Ted and I are going back to the land. She doesn't seem to believe it, and makes weird and awful suggestions about minor posts in Government Offices, which, if she knew Ted half as well as I do, she would realize was something like harnessing an elephant to a perambulator. However, it's perfectly true, and while I'm on the subject I might mention that in selecting our wedding presents, our friends would do well to turn their attention to spades, and barrows, and hoes, and threshing machines, and those sort of things. I told the Angel Burnett to-day she'd better give us a mangle and a few flat-irons, as I supposed we'd have to wash at home. The Angel Burnett's husband, who is my respected papa-in-law, prophesies dire and awful disaster in the near future, but we consoled him with the information that in such an event we should simply decamp to Rhodesia and squat on our—ahem!—property there."

"It is far more probable we shall be visiting the two of you at Colney Hatch, or the nearest workhouse," from the sceptical Truda.

"Well, you won't want a dress like that on the land," said Ralph approvingly; "so you might give it to Truda. I'll give you a homespun straight up-and-down thing in exchange."

"No, that's where our concession comes in. To soothe the family dignity we are going to choose our Small Holding where there is good hunting, and make each other a wedding-present of a thoroughbred hunter apiece. Also, when we emerge—from the turnips, etc.—we shall do so in a style befitting our illustrious names, and to that end, I became the happy possessor of this Paquin robe, while there was yet time."

"I suppose you'll have a motor or two as well, and a high dog-cart and a butler."

"I thought Dinah would perhaps take the produce to market in a motor," put in Ted.

"So thoughtful and clever of you, dearest—but a little out of date. My idea was a flying machine and immense advertisements: 'Eggs delivered by Flying Machine, within two minutes of laying—butter likewise within two minutes of making—orders executed at lowest possible cost of life and limb.' That ought to fetch everyone."

"If you had gone for a honeymoon in a flying machine," remarked Truda, still with that sceptical air, "it would

not have surprised me half as much as this mad farming freak. You know you love gaiety, Dinah, and going about a lot, and hosts of friends."

"I *did*," Dinah corrected; "now I love farming, and, incidentally, a farmer. There is no possible gain to anyone in dragging my ancient frivolity to light, Truda. I have eschewed those things with my frivolous years. I am now less of a butterfly, and more of a person. And, as I said before, I love farming. The smell of ploughed earth gives me sensations beyond all description, the——"

"What about the smell of the farmyards?" interrupted Truda.

"That, likewise, has an amazing effect upon my—my—sensational phenomena. I may say that I revel in it, and no sweet and simple music delights my hearing more exuberantly than the general waking-up chorus of a farmyard."

"Really!" ejaculated Ralph. "It's the one thing that makes me use really bad language."

"And as for harvesting," ignoring him, "it is my zenith. I positively radiate with voluptuous rejoicing like a chronic Harvest Thanksgiving Service. What comes next, Ted? Is it roots or hay?"

"Hay after corn! You're a fine farmer, Di!" from the depths of the amiable Ralph's arm-chair. "You'll be trying to reap at Christmas and sow at Midsummer."

"Must we sow?" Dinah made a little *moue*. "I've a special antipathy to anyone sowing. A man I know—you know the sort—well, he—he—sows. That's all—you laugh the day after to-morrow."

"Well, if you didn't sow," from Truda, "it would certainly save you the expense of reaping, and that's about the most sensible suggestion you've made yet."

"Truda," warningly, "when you talk like that you give your age away. It's no use looking forty-five if you talk as if you were fifty."

Smothered chuckles from the big arm-chair proclaimed one appreciative listener, anyhow; while Ted Burnett gallantly came to the rescue with: "She should have said 'looking twenty.'"

"Thank you, Captain Burnett. It seems to me, no doubt, with a view to evening up things, that Nature has married you and me to two hopeless idiots."

"That's so comforting," asserted Dinah. "It means one can be as mad as one likes, and people will only say,

'She can't help it, she's a little wanting—poor thing! Do you feel like a poor thing, Ralph?'

"Sometimes. Notably when Vi, and Ralph junior, and Mervyn have been playing bears on the top of me, with a temperature of eighty in the shade."

"They shall play ducks in the duck-pond when they come to stay with me, and wild Indians on the top of the hay-rick. It's partly for their sake I'm so keen on this 'back to the land' scheme."

"It will also entice Billy home at an early date. If he's quite sure he can still be on a farm, and strut about all day with a gun, he'll come quickly enough. Of course, it's awfully plebeian of both of us—but there it is—and it looks as if our horror-struck relations would have to make the best of it. The Angel Burnett seems to be taking it the most sensibly. Having exhausted all her guinea-fowl recipes, she's now reading up 'Modern Dairies' for us, and I asked her to try and find out how to make skim-milk look unskimmed, with a little delicate manipulation. I meant to ask her to find out something about guinea-pigs. It's a branch of agricultural knowledge I'm afraid to allude to, because of my profound ignorance of it. Is a guinea-pig a sucking pig? or is a sucking-pig a guinea-pig? And in which of them do the eyes drop out if you hold it up by the tail? Make a note of it, Ted, and we'll write to some 'Answers to Correspondence' column, in case the mater isn't able to enlighten us. Bridge, did you say?" observing the youthful uncle change to the other corner of his big arm-chair. "Come along. Ted and I played all the way home on board with a duck of a General, and the Chairman of the Frights—you know the sort of frights I mean—railway parcels and that kind of thing. They gave me the General for a partner because he had a flashing, nerve-numbing blue eye—and a reputation for hitting the nail on the head—or his partner—if things were fuzzled. They thought he couldn't hurt me"—moving towards the table 'Truda and her husband were preparing; "but, there came a time when I had to admit he'd done everything except break my spirit. But it didn't matter from him—a sheer duck of a General, wasn't he, Ted? And he was once at the same station as your old regiment—wasn't he, dear? and knew all about what a naughty, giddy, little soldier-boy you used to be."

Truda looked up with a smile.

"Nothing very dreadful, I hope?"

"Dreadful!" echoed Dinah; "appalling—positively appalling; don't let us speak of it. Even now I shudder at the recollection of those revelations; and with anyone of Ralph's leaning to obesity! you understand, dear! The shock—not to say the—the—thrilling nerve strain. No, Ralph"—turning to her partner—"I am not going to talk all through the rubber, and I am going to play the eleven convention, if you know what that is. The dear General drummed it into me until I was nearly silly."

Later on, as she slipped into her costly fur-lined evening cloak, ready to depart to her husband's home, where they were staying, she told them gaily: "We're motoring into Somersetshire to-morrow, as we've a fancy for a Small Holding where there is stag-hunting."

"Does she ever allow you to talk for a change?" was Truda's parting question of the quietly adoring husband.

"Never," promptly; "but it's an ideal arrangement, because it saves me no end of bother, and if I just put in a 'yes' and a 'no' occasionally, she never knows whether I'm really listening or not."

CHAPTER XLIV

THE OFFSPRING

It was in Somerset after all that they pitched their tent, and founded what Dinah was pleased to call at varying times, the Cabbage Patch, the Potato Plot, the Goose Walk, or the Ancestral Hall. It could hardly be said that their farming prospered, as far as much money-making went, but they contrived not to be out of pocket, which more than astonished some of their sceptical relatives. Dinah's farming consisted chiefly of breeding Dachshunds, and Ted never lost a leaning to horse-breeding, but whatever their latest fad—and it must be admitted they were many—they basked in a never-failing degree of popularity among their neighbours far and wide.

Soon after they were settled, and, as Dinah put it, still wondering what one ought to buy for a farm, and what to grow, and what to do with it when grown, Billy came home for a six months' visit. At the end of four he told Dinah

he was going back. He said he'd had a ripping time, and he was much obliged to her, but he could "hear the buck a-calling," and go he must.

"Now what have you been up to in Town?" said Dinah, for he had just come back from a few days in London, and had said nothing about this departure before he went.

"Walking up and down the Strand!" Billy told her.

"My dear! how rash!—like any silly greenhorn up from the country!"

"No, I was lost in thought!"

"Good heavens! Did the motors run round you, then?"

"No, I kept on the pavement, near a certain shop."

"What an asinine proceeding. I wonder you weren't taken to a home for lost bipeds."

"I wonder what was in the shop!" suggested Ted.

Billy heaved a deep-drawn sigh. "She's not there now," he said.

"She?" cried Dinah. "Oh, Billy, you haven't been and gone and——"

"It's all right, I bought her," he interrupted.

"What in the world's the matter with him, Ted?" with a helpless air.

"I don't know," with a sly smile, "unless he means he bought her silence."

"Silence!" echoed Billy; "not much. It's the only thing I have against her. She's a perfect little beauty otherwise. I went into the shop twice and carried her round for the joy of it before I finally decided. I wanted the man to take something off on account of the noise she made."

"Billy, Billy!" breaking out into a laugh; "have you bought a wife or a dog?"

"Neither. It was a wife or a gun, and that's why I walked up and down the Strand."

"A wife or a gun—what *do* you mean?" getting more bewildered. "Billy, do wake up."

Billy pulled solemnly at his pipe for a few moments then, as if settling an affair of the nation, he said:

"It's this way. On the voyage home I took a particular fancy to a nice little girl on board, and I developed a sort of feeling I'd like to take a wife back to Rhodesia. Then, the other day I was walking down the Strand and I saw the best little rifle you ever set eyes on in a shop window.

Of course, I wanted it. I went in and looked it over and fingered it, and only wanted it more. Then I remembered about the wife. I went outside and walked up and down a bit to consider, because the only thing I was dead certain about was, that I couldn't afford both. The question was: should I take back to Rhodesia the wife or the rifle? I recalled the colour of her eyes, and the lilt of her hair, don't you call it? and the turn of her nose, and then I went and had another look at the rifle. I wanted it more than ever, but I went out once more for a final consideration. Then I went back—and . . . well—it will be the wife's turn the next time I come home."

"Billy, you ass! What in the world should you do with a wife! She's had a good let off, if you ask me! . . ."

But the long and short of it was that, what with his precious rifle and the "buck a-calling," Billy went off back to Rhodesia, saying England was a good place to go home to die in—but a dim, damp, unpleasant place to live in.

Dinah said good-bye a little mournfully, and then hurried back to the "Burnett Nurseries," which were just then full to overflowing of small Dachshunds. It was not so very much longer before, in a most characteristic letter, she wrote to Joyce and Cecil and invited herself and another to their still peacefully happy home.

"I want to bring the Offspring down to see you," she said; "she's very fat, and very wobbly, and has a face like a rising sun, but her proud father calls her a pink-and-white cherub, and fondly imagines she inherits his good looks. I say, my last litter of Dachsies can give her points twice over; but for once the man-thing has got something he likes better than his horses or his gun, and he protests himself blue in the face that she's such a piece of infantine perfection as the world has never seen before.

"To tell you the truth, we're both a bit afraid of her, especially when nurse is around, as we're not quite sure of the proper way to hold her; and when she screams we nearly have apoplectic fits trying to think why she does it and what she wants? It's a sure fact we can't either of us stop her, and she apparently gets so infuriated over our stupidity that she ends by making noise enough

to wake the dead, and then nurse flies to the rescue, and catches her up and says, 'Did they then! . . . did they! . . .' and Ted and I feel guilty of manslaughter at least, and slink away in a crestfallen fashion to our horses and dogs. Some of these days, when nurse is safely out of the way, I shall shake her—because I know she's just pulling our leg over it. It's exactly the thing I should do in her place, and it's ridiculous for Ted to dither about it showing firmness of character already. Anyhow, if it does, at this rate she'll be inviting us into our own house before long, and chaperoning me up to Town. I don't believe in strong-willed daughters, and she'll get that shake yet! I shall shut all the windows, and arrange to have the dogs barking as loud as they can.

"Good-bye—can't stop a moment—Baby is crying, and I must see what's the matter. Ted and I will probably meet and jam in the doorway, while the Offspring looks down her nose at us!

"DINAH."

After which epistle Dinah actually did turn up with a jolly little baby-girl, whom she secretly adored, while never tired of making a jest of her.

And in less than five years it was a small troop of three sturdy infants who duly arrived to pick buttercups and play on the sands with Auntie Joyce, and Dinah gave up her Dachshunds, to devote herself to the rising generation. One Suffragette, One Defender of the Empire, and One Judicial Righter of Wrongs, she said she had contributed as her share to the good of the State, and in future she thought of confining her attention to her own well-being.

Billy and Beauty and Jim had a godchild apiece, and were duly regaled with descriptive letters concerning their infantine precocity.

In which happy state we may surely leave Dinah's household and her ever-adoring husband, and turn for a last look at that quiet Desired Haven, with its friendly lighthouse, and its river flowing peacefully out to the sea.

CHAPTER XLV

FAREWELL

"*Five dear years.*" That was how Joyce spoke of that short happiness on the Headland, granted to her and Cecil. For as the fifth year drew to a close, in mellow, ripe September, it became apparent to both that the limit was nearly reached.

All through the previous winter she had failed, and just when Cecil buoyed his hope on the return of spring, a short, sharp attack of influenza laid her lower than ever.

No one could actually say whether it was the first shock of the child's death, or the second shock of the letter while she was still so unnerved, that was the actual beginning of the end; but Cecil held always to the belief that without the second shock, had her husband accepted his fate in a manly way and quietly freed her, he would have been able to save her from the effects of the first. As it was, though their great happiness in each other was indisputable, the shadow of the parting hung over them from the first; and the man who had given all his best years to saving life, and attained so great skill in the science of healing, was compelled to look on helplessly while the life he held dearer than all the world drifted beyond the power of earthly aid. And when, it seemed to him, that she was solely the victim of a petty tyranny, not only in the man who chose to hold his bond intact, but in a civilization ruled by prejudice, it was small wonder he felt bitter. Either were welcome to do their worst to him. He was a man, and strong, and made of the stuff that gets up again after a fall and shows an undaunted front, but it was hard indeed that they should be able to strike at her, when she was too weak for self-defence, and he be unable to protect her.

For himself, he had triumphed already with a treatise of unmistakable power and worth; and it was probably merely a question of time before the world was ready to fall at his feet again and let bygones be bygones. But what of a triumph without her? What matter if he was

up or down—slandered or praised—if the great emptiness of her loss held sway in his life? The bitter irony of such a triumph, sank at times into his soul with merciless weight.

But there was no bitterness in Joyce. The time when she had schooled herself into expecting so little, and given all her energies to pluckily making the very best of that little, left small room for bitterness now.

"Five dear years," as she told him once in an effort to comfort him; "and how many people, dearest, have five such perfect hours in all their lives?"

In those last weeks it was she who assumed the guise of comforter and supporter, and on the threshold of that vague, unknown Eternity, which filled his man's soul chiefly with awe and dread, she, with her woman's frailty, turned to look back, as it were from the Dread Portals, to throw him words of comfort and cheer.

One day he noticed that she had ever near her a sheet of paper upon which she had at some time copied something, doubtless from a favourite book. He took it up one afternoon as she slept, and read the faint pencilled words. It proved to be a passage from Fiona Macleod's "Divine Adventure," and ran:

"When, tired, I lay down the pen—and with it the last of mortal uses—it will be to face the glory of a new day. I have no fear. I shall not leave all I have loved, for I have that in me which binds me to this beautiful world, for another life at least, it may be for many lives. And that within me which dreamed and hoped shall now more gladly and wonderfully dream, and hope, and seek, and know, and see ever deeper and further into the mystery of beauty and truth. And that within me which *knew* now *knows*. In the deepest sense there is no spiritual dream that is not true, no hope that shall for ever go famished, no tears that shall not be gathered into the brooding skies of compassion, to fall again in healing dew.

"There are mysteries of which I cannot write; not from any occult secret, but because they are so simple and inevitable, that, like the mystery of day and night, or the change of the seasons, or life and death, they must be learned by each, in his own way, in his own hour. It is out of their light that I see; it is by these stars that I set forth, where else I should be as a shadow upon a trackless waste."

With the paper in his hand the doctor stood a long time looking towards the sunset, and out of the radiant West it was as though a message came to him. It had hardly form or words, yet it entered his heart with a new sense of hope, driving much of the bitterness before it.

The "Power outside ourselves" was all the name he had been able to give for many a day to that Vague Unknown Mover of Destiny, whom men through the long centuries have alternatively cursed and loved and feared, but *never* yet wholly ignored.

That evening he felt for the first time that he could name that Power both God and Father.

He leaned down and kissed her tenderly as she slept, and it seemed that deep in his consciousness sank a hope, so sure as to be practically belief, that she was indeed going to a Love that could heal where his had failed, and protect for ever where he had been helpless.

* * * * *

Some months later, when he was living alone on the Headland, and Dinah and her husband were spending a week with him, she broached a little wonderingly, for the first time, that question of a penalty. She and Cecil were walking alone on the cliffs, while Ted had gone to golf.

"I've always been so glad," she said, "that at least neither of you ever regretted it."

"Never for one moment," he told her firmly. "Joyce was brave enough there. They might kill her with their unkindness, but they could not make her regret, when she once fully realized that I was satisfied. It is unthinkable," with a sad little smile; "but had that been otherwise, I mean had she thought I regretted, she would have died sooner."

And it was then Dinah said: "Do you look upon her death as the penalty?"

"No," gravely, "for one can only feel she would have died much sooner had she remained with him. I suppose if I have felt one thing more bitterly than anything ever before, it has been the knowledge of my own incompetence—the bringing home to me swiftly and surely how helpless I could be before some exigencies—how powerless to ward off certain mental and physical pain that I could have given my life to save her from. And now," very quietly, "there is only this great emptiness for my life's companion."

They moved on slowly ; and suddenly Dinah said with seeming irrelevance : " And I suppose he still sows——" he smiled, as one humouring her ; " and still calls upon the God of his fathers to observe his industry and his noble fleeing from all vice."

" You are too hard on him," he told her again ; " it is best not to judge. I for one, can hope that he finds some satisfaction in it ; for whether it was his own fault, or whether it was destiny, he lost the sweetest wife that any man was ever blessed with."

" Only he never knew it, and never would have known it to all time," she persisted. " It was her wifely obedience that appealed to him ; and the testimony, as long as it lasted, that she gave to his remarkable and fondly-believed-in perspicacity."

He did not reply, and they sat down in silence on a high boulder looking across the mouth of the river, and from whence they could see its winding course, through the long hills to the sea, and the yellow sand of the bar.

Beyond was again that glory of sunset that had so delighted their eyes the night he and Joyce had come to their haven. His thoughts went back to it yearningly, and then he repeated softly :—

" Sunset and evening star
And one clear call for me,
And may there be no moaning of the Bar
When I put out to sea.
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

" Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark,
And may there be no sadness of farewell
When I embark ;
For though from out our bourne of time and place
The flood may bear me far
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the Bar !"

" I should hardly dare to call myself a Christian," he told her simply ; " but I believe that is the spirit in which Joyce left us, and that she truly went to meet her Pilot face to face."

And in that moment, though he knew it not, the doctor was surely, at any rate, a public benefactor. For can it be otherwise than that the grief, which, in the grip of its own loss, can look at a *star* instead of a *grave*, and direct another's eyes thither—has conferred a benefit upon the Human Race?



THE END

